MARVEL MASTERWORKS®
THE MIGHTY THOR®
VOLUME 13

THE MIGHTY THOR Nos. 217-228

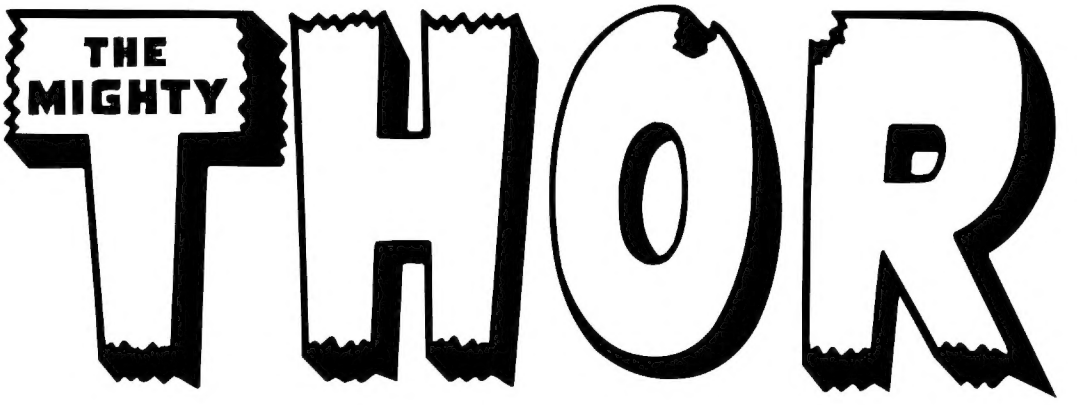
GERRY CONWAY & JOHN BUSCEMA

WITH RICH BUCKLER

MARVEL

MARVEL MASTERWORKS

PRESENTS



VOLUME 13

COLLECTING

THE MIGHTY THOR Nos. 217-228

GERRY CONWAY • JOHN BUSCEMA

WITH RICH BUCKLER

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MARVEL MASTERWORKS

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LO, THERE SHALL COME AN ENDING
BY GERRY CONWAY

Epic.

It's a word we throw around a lot in comics, and one of the series that first inspired fans to use the term was the original Stan Lee and Jack Kirby run of Thor stories from *Journey Into Mystery*, circa 1965-66.

Those were the stories that first brought the red-caped, blue-suited, helmet-headed super hero with a hammer back to his roots as the son of Odin, the God of Thunder, the Mjolnir-wielding warrior of Asgard. In the span of a year, Thor went from being an exciting super-powered hero with a fancy way of talking who battled run-of-the-mill villains like the Radioactive Man, the Absorbing Man and the Stone Men from Saturn, to a figure of legend fully immersed in a rich mythological heritage, partaking in adventures beyond the mortal realm. He battled the Enchantress and the Executioner. He fought the Destroyer. He returned to Asgard. He met Hercules.

For a young reader like yours truly, those early transitional tales, as Thor the super hero became Thor, the God of Thunder, were truly epic.

From the time I first got the assignment to write Thor's adventures, the first full-time writer to do so following The Man himself, Stan Lee, I wanted to write my very own epic God of Thunder adventures. In previous volumes of the *Marvel Masterworks* series you've seen some of the results, a few more successful than others. When I started writing Thor I was still in my teens, and still very new to Marvel. My grasp of language and story structure was still, shall we say, evolving, and my enthusiasm more than occasionally exceeded my ability. I'm proud of the work in the previous volumes, though some of it makes me shudder a bit with embarrassment for my younger self's now-and-then clumsy heavy-handedness. I love those previous stories both because and in spite of their failings.

This volume, however, can stand without an apology.

I'm proud of the issues collected here. Sure, there are the usual verbal and stylistic clichés of the time. (All the shouting. And why is everyone always declaiming the obvious? Use your indoor voices, for the love of Mike.) The plotting is more straightforward than I'm comfortable with now, but even so, these tales stand up pretty well, I think. I'll take some credit for that—I'd matured greatly as a writer—but even more of the credit goes to the great, late John Buscema, and to the collaborative partnership we'd forged over the previous years.

And, oddly, some credit has to go to a business decision designed to save Marvel's

corporate chiefs a few bucks, and which ended up inspiring some creative visual thinking, which in turn inspired the stories you hold in your hands.

First, a word or two about Big John Buscema and collaborative partnership.

John, as you can see from the work here, was a brilliant draftsman, a marvelous storyteller, and a master of page layout and design. He was also a long-time pro who'd Been There and Done That, and was no longer inspired by just the sheer fact of working in comics. He always tried to do his best work, but because he was so adept at drawing pretty much anything you tossed his way, he was given a lot to do that just held very little interest for him. You can see it in his work. His draftsmanship is always impeccable, his storytelling is always clear, but there's a dramatic difference between the design of a page from *Silver Surfer* or *Conan the Barbarian*, and the design of a page from *Fantastic Four*. He loved drawing Silver Surfer; he loved drawing Conan; he did not love drawing Fantastic Four.

Thor, for most of the time I worked with John prior to the year we're talking about here, was a mixed bag for him. Sometimes he loved drawing it. Sometimes he didn't. (I'm pretty sure he didn't love the stories set on Earth, or involving super fistfights between Thor and the Absorbing Man.) John was a consummate pro and always delivered the best work he could, but he was also a passionate artist, and when he wasn't passionate about a project, you could tell.

He was passionate about the stories we told here.

One of the great things about working with an artist for several years, as I did with John on *Thor*, is the opportunity it gives you to learn what you do well together. Like any relationship, the partnership of a writer and an artist on a series goes through an arc of mutual discovery. In the early stages you learn how to communicate with each other. You discover what inspires the best in your partner (and what brings out the worst). You explore your strengths and weaknesses. It's a two-way street of course. Lots of writers will tell you they've learned how to write to an artist's strengths and avoid their weak spots, but it's also true that artists learn how to compensate for a writer's weaknesses and play to the wordsmith's strengths. Some of this is communicated directly, when an artist tells a writer he can't possibly accomplish what the writer is asking, or when a writer tells an artist the artist has completely missed the point of a plot setup the writer carefully established early on in his script.

But some of the communication—most of it—is never clearly verbalized. Like jazz musicians contributing to a melody, the writer and artist unconsciously anticipate and collaborate without ever discussing their methods or intentions. It just…happens. Magically, it all just comes together.

Magically, overnight, over a period of four years.

This volume represents the last work Big John Buscema and I did together on Thor, and from every viewpoint—storytelling, scope, mastery of craft and character—I think it fulfills the implications of the word epic.

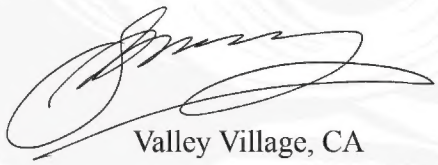
Some of the themes here we visited before—Ego, the Living Planet, makes a return appearance, as do the Colonizers of Rigel, and Hercules—but I'd like to think this time around we fulfill their potential. There are some deliberate attempts to draw parallels with mythic tales—the return to Asgard that begins the volume is meant to remind the reader of Ulysses's return to Ithaca after the Trojan Wars, and the Krista/Pluto storyline is clearly a call-out to the Persephone myth. But for the most part John and I are just having a lot of fun telling Big Stories on a Big Scale. (That's particularly true with the Black Star arc, where the goal was to keep getting bigger and bigger, as literally as we could.) There's also a heavy science fiction aspect to the material here, reflecting my own interest in space opera. ("The Black Star Passes" by John Campbell being one of the great Big Dumb Space Operas of all time, I'm tipping my hat to it here.)

And there's the technical/financial issue I mentioned before that also contributed to our creative approach to these stories.

The early- to mid-1970s were a financially troublesome time for comic book publishers. Sales were down and expenses were up. Marvel and DC both tried to find ways to save money. DC raised prices and added reprint pages to their comics in an effort to cut costs. Marvel kept prices down and cut story pages in its attempt to do the same. But Marvel didn't want to *appear* to cut pages, so when the edict came down, Editor in Chief Roy Thomas came up with an idea to keep the same number of pages in print. He asked us to do one page in each issue that could be printed horizontally as a two-page spread. The result, for most comics, was a bit of a mess—weak-looking spreads that didn't use the scope of two pages effectively. You'll find a couple of them in here. But you'll also find quite a few two-page spreads that raise the visual stakes in a story, and I know for a fact that in at least a few cases, trying to devise an effective use of a two-page spread actually inspired the entire story. (See if you can guess which stories were inspired by that particular visual/design demand.)

It's obvious to me, looking at these stories, John and I had a great time creating them. As a swan song to my time on the series, I couldn't be any happier.

I hope you have as much fun reading these tales as we had telling them.



Valley Village, CA
2014

THOR
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THE MIGHTY
THOR®
FATHER AGAINST SON!
ODIN AGAINST THOR!
GOD VS. GOD!
TO THE WINNER:
ASGARD!
AND TO THE LOSER--DEATH!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE MIGHTY THOR! ™

GERRY CONWAY / SCRIPTER | JOHN BUSCEMA & SAL BUSCEMA / ARTISTS EXEMPLAR | J. COSTANZA, LETTERER / P. GOLDBERG, COLORIST | ROY THOMAS, / EDITOR

ALL SWORDS AGAINST THEM!

LO, THE GOLDEN GATES OF ASGARD!

LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE THE EYES OF THESE HARRIED WARRIORS LAST BEHELD THE ETERNAL REALM-- AND MANY THE BATTLES THEY'VE FOUGHT IN THE DAYS SINCE THAT HOUR AND THIS.

THOSE ADVENTURES BELONG TO ANOTHER TALE, HOWEVER... FOR NOW A NEW EPISODE IS ABOUT TO BE ADDED TO THE HISTORY OF THIS GLEAMING LAND, AS ODIN AND HIS WARRIORS RETURN HOME TO DISCOVER--

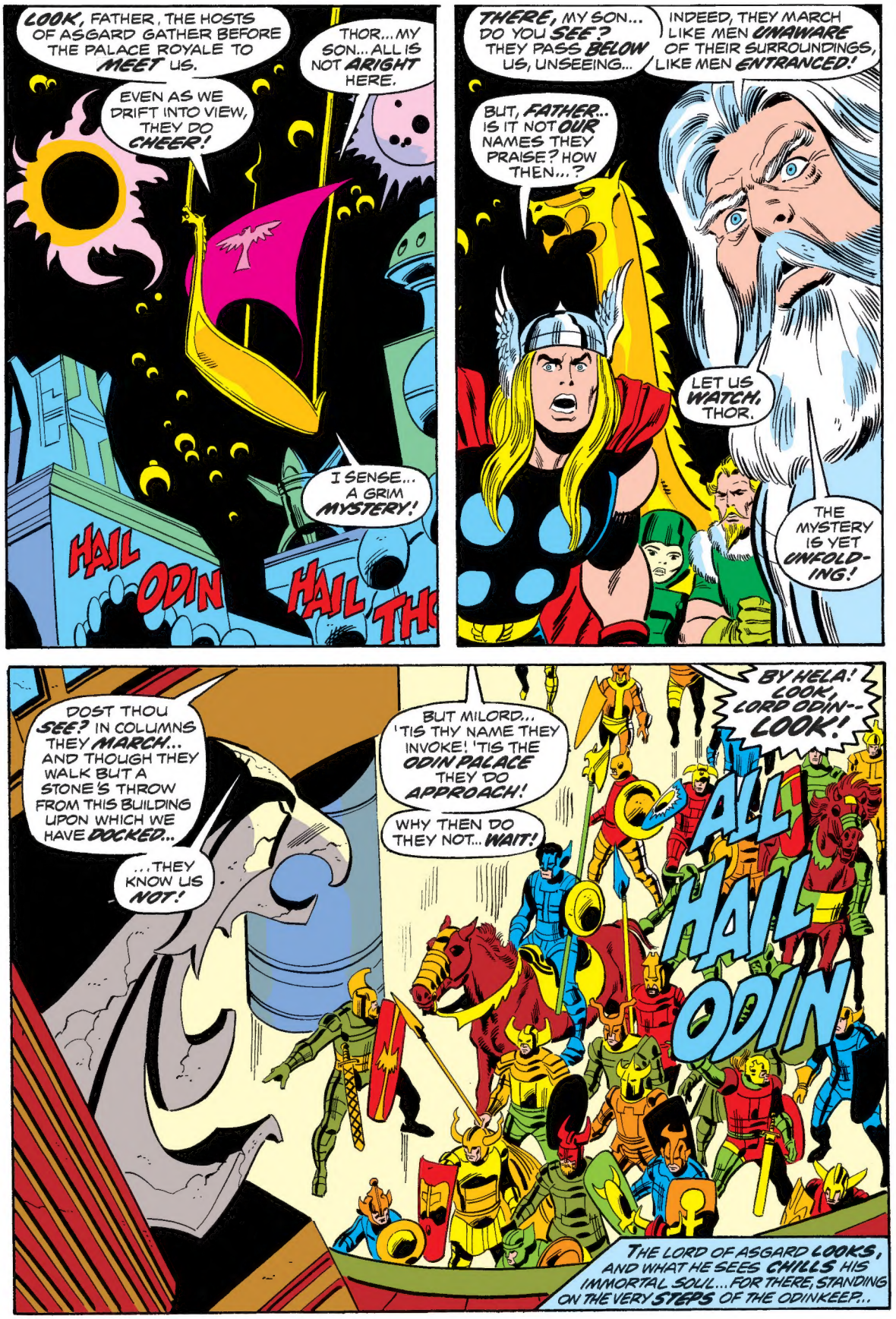
ASGARD, MILORD ODIN... MILADY SIF! THY HOME AND MINE!

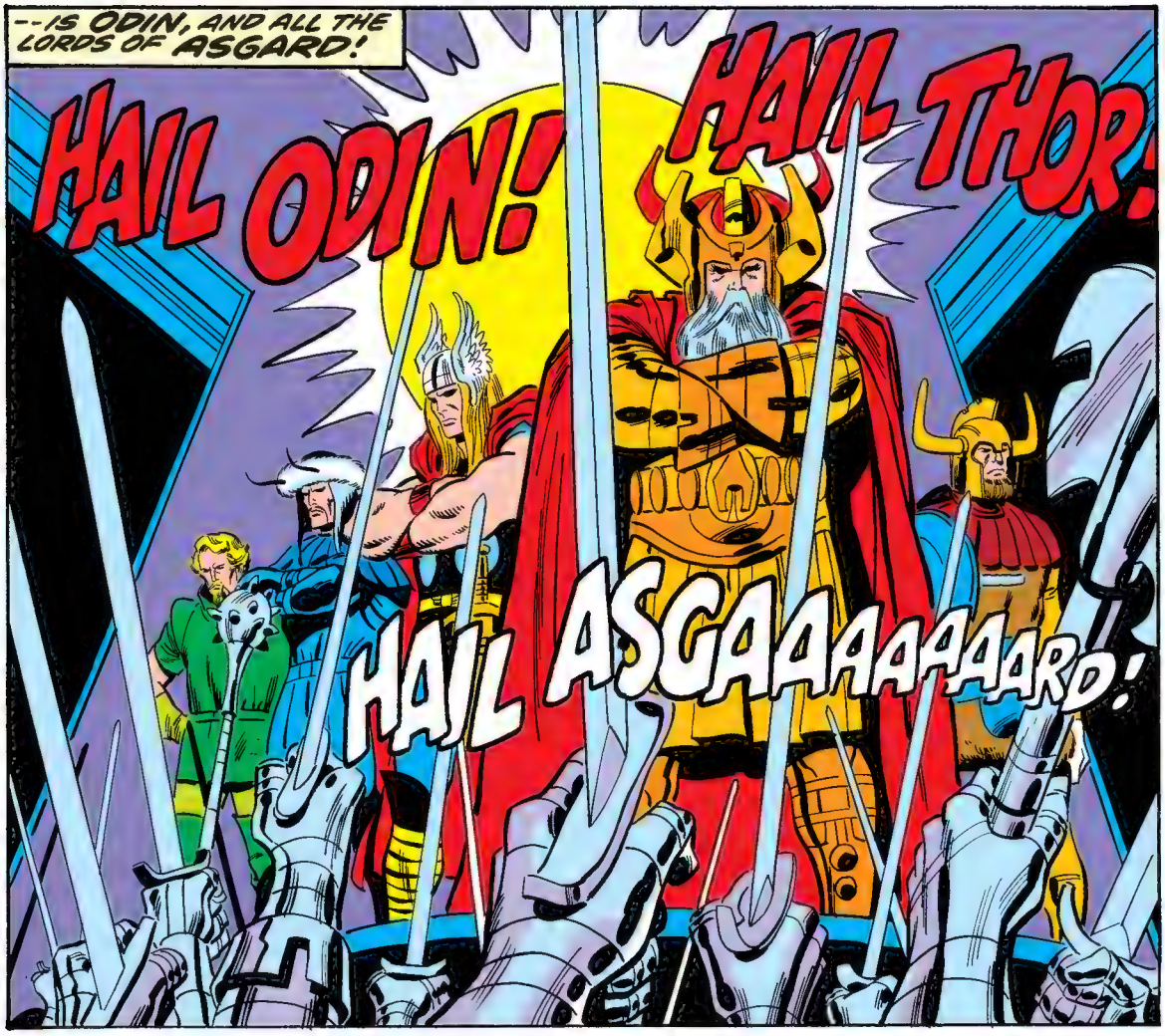
ALL AGONIES WILL I SUFFER, IF ONLY TO RETURN TO THAT GOLDEN LAND ONCE MORE!

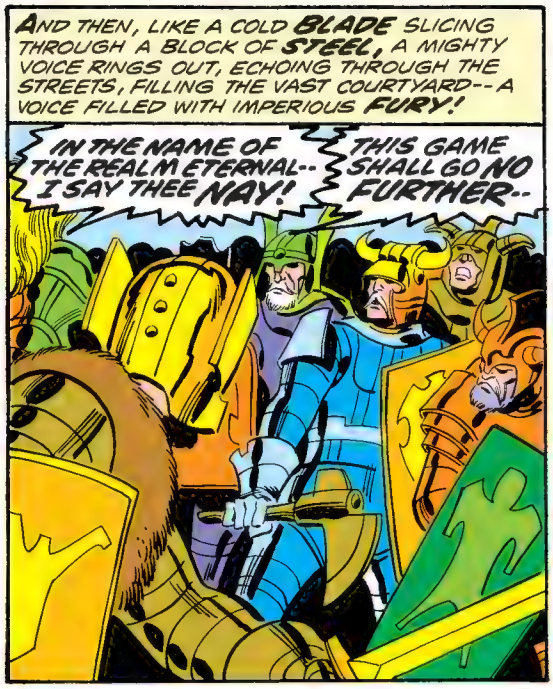
VERILY, 'TIS GOOD TO BE HOME, MY SON.

LET US LAND AND GREET THOSE WARRIORS BORN!

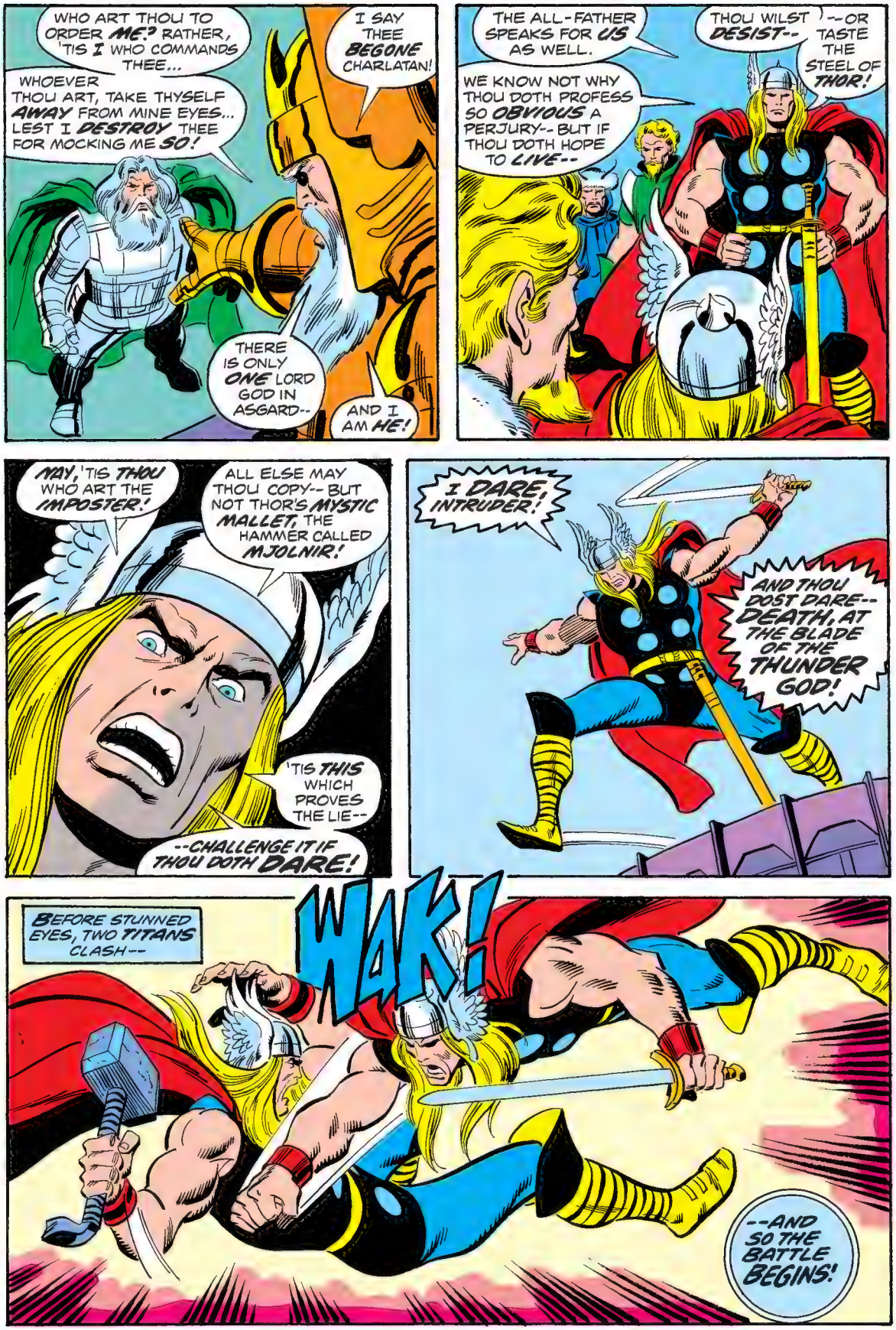
1625 Z


LOOK, FATHER, THE HOSTS OF ASGARD GATHER BEFORE THE PALACE ROYALE TO MEET US.
THOR... MY SON... ALL IS NOT ARIGHT HERE.
EVEN AS WE DRIFT INTO VIEW, THEY DO CHEER!
I SENSE... A GRIM MYSTERY!
HAIL ODIN
HAIL TH
THERE, MY SON... DO YOU SEE? THEY PASS BELOW US, UNSEEING...
INDEED, THEY MARCH LIKE MEN UNAWARE OF THEIR SURROUNDINGS, LIKE MEN ENTRANCED!
BUT, FATHER... IS IT NOT OUR NAMES THEY PRAISE? HOW THEN...?
LET US WATCH, THOR.
THE MYSTERY IS YET UNFOLDING!
DOST THOU SEE? IN COLUMNS THEY MARCH... AND THOUGH THEY WALK BUT A STONE'S THROW FROM THIS BUILDING UPON WHICH WE HAVE DOCKED...
...THEY KNOW US NOT!
BUT MILORD... 'TIS THY NAME THEY INVOKE! 'TIS THE ODIN PALACE THEY DO APPROACH!
WHY THEN DO THEY NOT... WAIT!
BY HELA! LOOK, LORD ODIN-- LOOK!
ALL HAIL ODIN
THE LORD OF ASGARD LOOKS, AND WHAT HE SEES CHILLS HIS IMMORTAL SOUL... FOR THERE, STANDING ON THE VERY STEPS OF THE ODINKEEP...

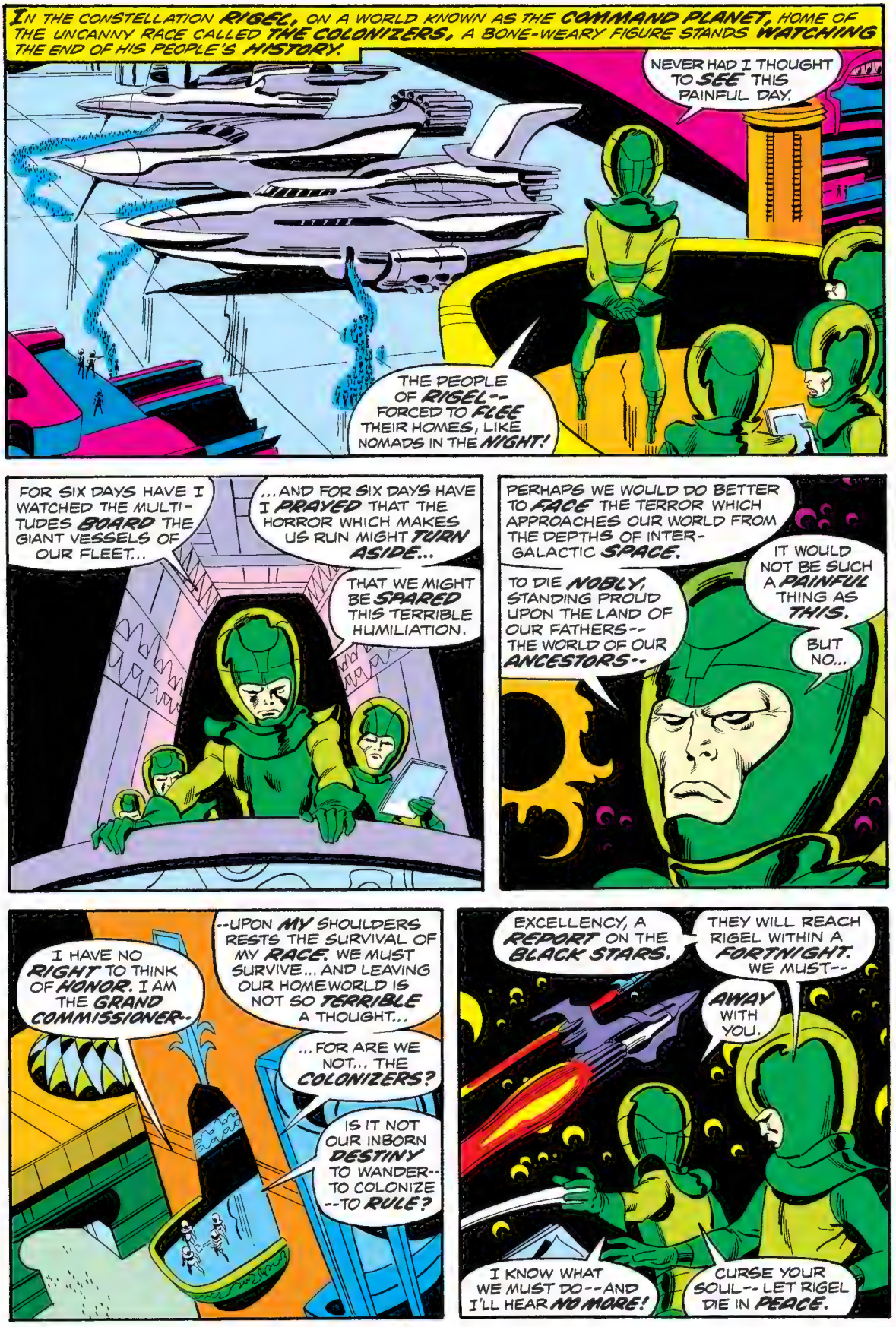

--IS ODIN, AND ALL THE LORDS OF ASGARD!
HAIL ODIN!
HAIL THOR!
HAIL ASGAAAAAAAARD!

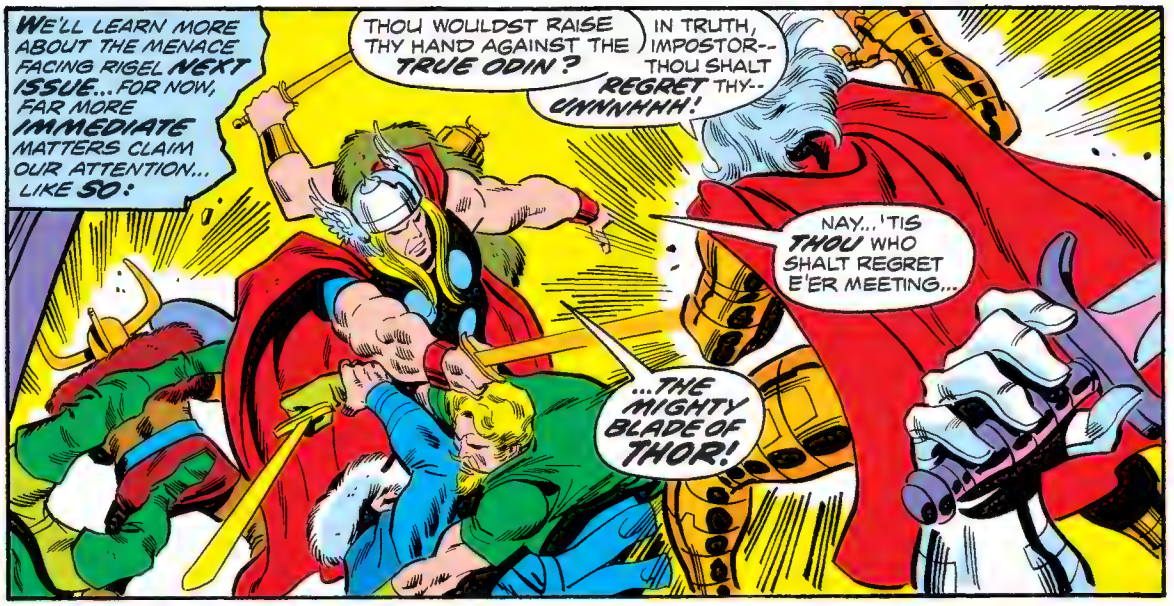

AND THEN, LIKE A COLD BLADE SLICING THROUGH A BLOCK OF STEEL, A MIGHTY VOICE RINGS OUT, ECHOING THROUGH THE STREETS, FILLING THE VAST COURTYARD--A VOICE FILLED WITH IMPERIOUS FURY!
IN THE NAME OF THE REALM ETERNAL--I SAY THEE NAY!
THIS GAME SHALL GO NO FURTHER--

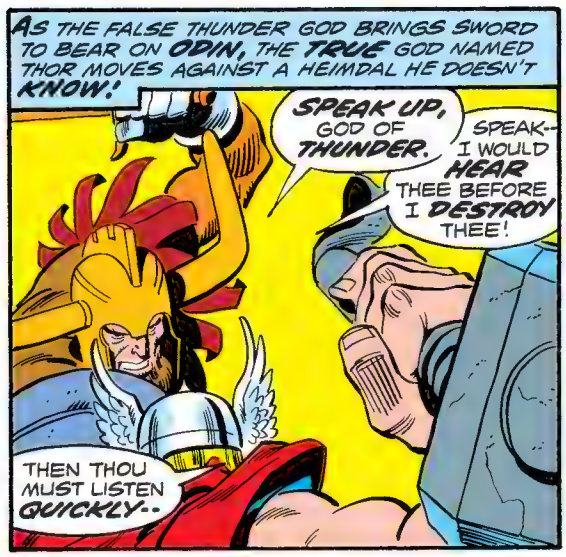
SO SAYS ODIN... LIEGE OF ALL ASGARD, THY LORD MOST HIGH!
GET THEE HENCE, IMPOSTOR--LEST THOU DOTH FEEL MY REGAL WRATH!
AND THE WRATH OF THOSE WHO STAND WITH ODIN!

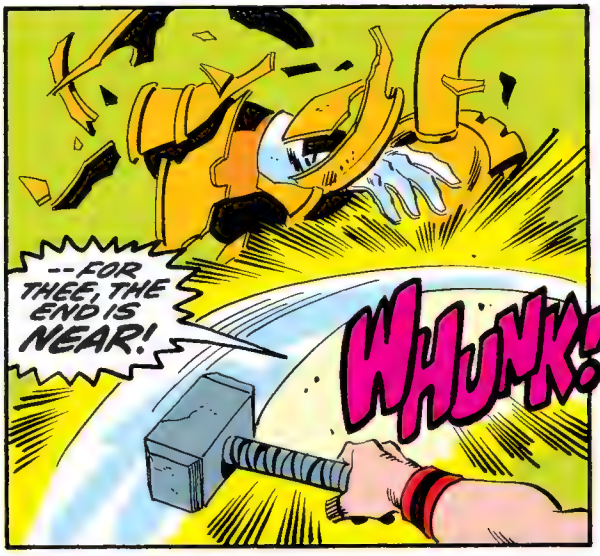

WHO ART THOU TO ORDER ME? RATHER, 'TIS I WHO COMMANDS THEE...
I SAY THEE BEGONE CHARLATAN!
WHOEVER THOU ART, TAKE THYSELF AWAY FROM MINE EYES... LEST I DESTROY THEE FOR MOCKING ME SO!
THERE IS ONLY ONE LORD GOD IN ASGARD--
AND I AM HE!
THE ALL-FATHER SPEAKS FOR US AS WELL.
THOU WILST DESIST--
--OR TASTE THE STEEL OF THOR!
WE KNOW NOT WHY THOU DOTH PROFESS SO OBVIOUS A PERJURY-- BUT IF THOU DOTH HOPE TO LIVE--
NAY, 'TIS THOU WHO ART THE IMPOSTER!
ALL ELSE MAY THOU COPY-- BUT NOT THOR'S MYSTIC MALLET, THE HAMMER CALLED MJOLNIR!
'TIS THIS WHICH PROVES THE LIE--
--CHALLENGE IT IF THOU DOTH DARE!
I DARE, INTRUDER!
AND THOU DOST DARE-- DEATH, AT THE BLADE OF THE THUNDER GOD!
BEFORE STUNNED EYES, TWO TITANS CLASH--
WAK!
--AND SO THE BATTLE BEGINS!

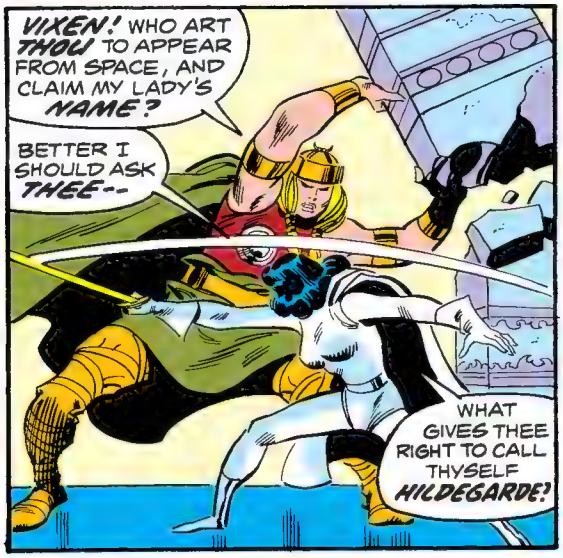
VILLAIN! THOU DOST AVOID MY EVERY THRUST!
VERILY, IMPOSTOR-- THOU DOST THINK ME A FOOL?
DOST THOU DREAM I'D WAIT ON THEE--
--LIKE A LAMB AT THE SLAUGHTER?
AFTER THEM, NOBLE LORDS! FIGHT THEM AS WE'VE FOUGHT TOGETHER THESE PAST DAYS, IN THE VOID BETWEEN THE STARS!
FIGHT THEM FOR ODIN--
--FOR THOR, AND YEA-- FOR ASGARD!
TWAK!
KLANG!
SWISH!
THEN, AS THE SOLDIERS OF THE ETERNAL REALM SURGE FORWARD TO AID THEIR LIEGE-- A LORD THEY THINK IS ODIN-- THE TRUE ALL-FATHER BELLOWS AN IMPERIAL COMMAND!
NAY-- THOU SHALT GO NO FURTHER!
NO INNOCENT BLOOD SHALL BE SHED THIS DAY--
AND SO I SAY UNTO THEE-- THOU SHALT BE HELD BACK, PARALYZED BY THE ATOMS OF THE AIR--
--AND SO SHALT THOU NOBLE WARRIORS REMAIN, TILL BATTLE IS DONE..
--AND ONLY THE TRUE GODS HAVE WON!
MEANWHILE, SEVERAL HUNDRED LIGHT-YEARS AWAY...


IN THE CONSTELLATION RIGEL, ON A WORLD KNOWN AS THE COMMAND PLANET, HOME OF THE UNCANNY RACE CALLED THE COLONIZERS, A BONE-WEARY FIGURE STANDS WATCHING THE END OF HIS PEOPLE'S HISTORY.
NEVER HAD I THOUGHT TO SEE THIS PAINFUL DAY.
THE PEOPLE OF RIGEL-- FORCED TO FLEE THEIR HOMES, LIKE NOMADS IN THE NIGHT!
FOR SIX DAYS HAVE I WATCHED THE MULTITUDES BOARD THE GIANT VESSELS OF OUR FLEET...
...AND FOR SIX DAYS HAVE I PRAYED THAT THE HORROR WHICH MAKES US RUN MIGHT TURN ASIDE...
THAT WE MIGHT BE SPARED THIS TERRIBLE HUMILIATION.
PERHAPS WE WOULD DO BETTER TO FACE THE TERROR WHICH APPROACHES OUR WORLD FROM THE DEPTHS OF INTERGALACTIC SPACE.
TO DIE NOBLY, STANDING PROUD UPON THE LAND OF OUR FATHERS-- THE WORLD OF OUR ANCESTORS--
IT WOULD NOT BE SUCH A PAINFUL THING AS THIS.
BUT NO...
I HAVE NO RIGHT TO THINK OF HONOR. I AM THE GRAND COMMISSIONER--
--UPON MY SHOULDERS RESTS THE SURVIVAL OF MY RACE. WE MUST SURVIVE... AND LEAVING OUR HOMEWORLD IS NOT SO TERRIBLE A THOUGHT...
...FOR ARE WE NOT... THE COLONIZERS?
IS IT NOT OUR INBORN DESTINY TO WANDER-- TO COLONIZE --TO RULE?
EXCELLENCY, A REPORT ON THE BLACK STARS.
THEY WILL REACH RIGEL WITHIN A FORTNIGHT. WE MUST--
AWAY WITH YOU.
I KNOW WHAT WE MUST DO--AND I'LL HEAR NO MORE!
CURSE YOUR SOUL-- LET RIGEL DIE IN PEACE.

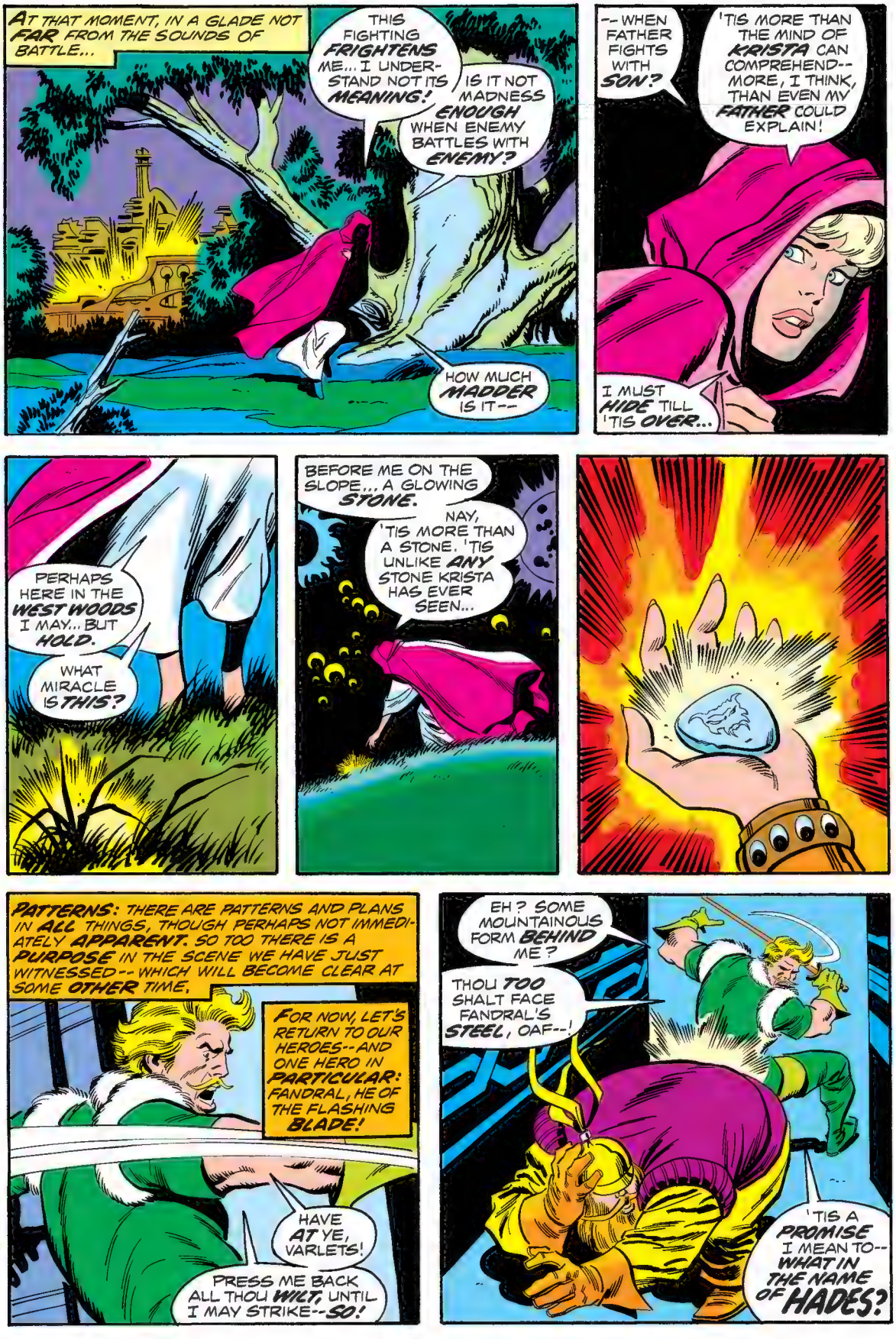

WE'LL LEARN MORE ABOUT THE MENACE FACING RIGEL NEXT ISSUE... FOR NOW, FAR MORE IMMEDIATE MATTERS CLAIM OUR ATTENTION... LIKE SO:
THOU WOULDST RAISE THY HAND AGAINST THE TRUE ODIN?
IN TRUTH, IMPOSTOR-- THOU SHALT REGRET THY--
UNNNHHH!
NAY.. 'TIS THOU WHO SHALT REGRET E'ER MEETING...
...THE MIGHTY BLADE OF THOR!

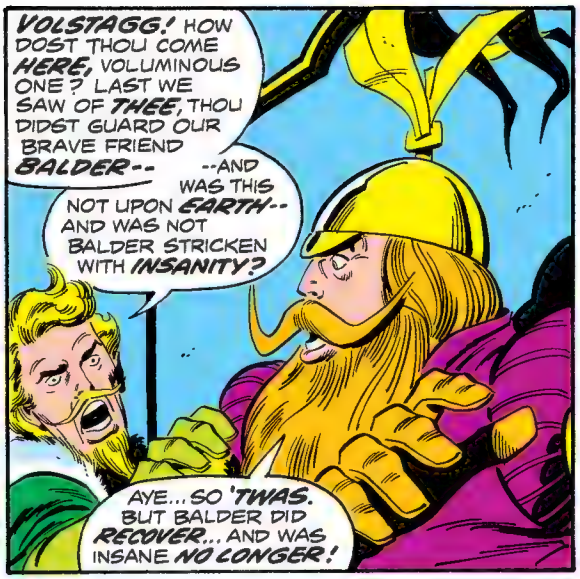

AS THE FALSE THUNDER GOD BRINGS SWORD TO BEAR ON ODIN, THE TRUE GOD NAMED THOR MOVES AGAINST A HEIMDAL HE DOESN'T KNOW!
SPEAK UP, GOD OF THUNDER.
SPEAK-- I WOULD HEAR THEE BEFORE I DESTROY THEE!
THEN THOU MUST LISTEN QUICKLY..

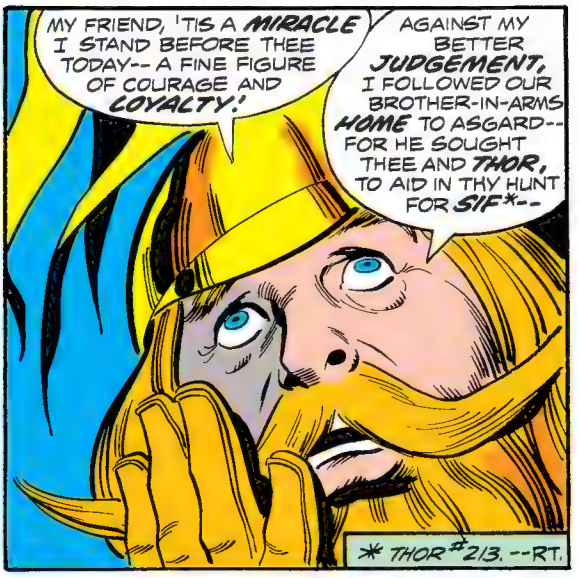

--FOR THEE, THE END IS NEAR!
WHUNK!

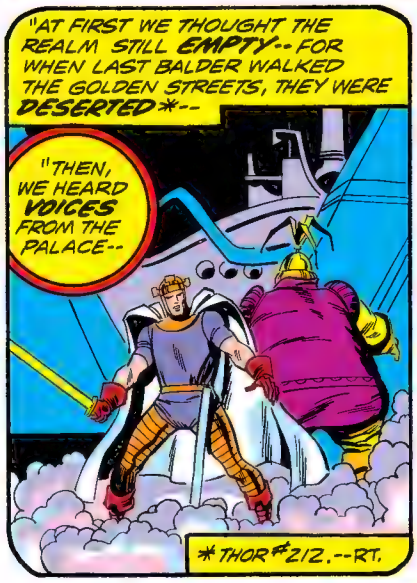

VIXEN! WHO ART THOU TO APPEAR FROM SPACE, AND CLAIM MY LADY'S NAME?
BETTER I SHOULD ASK THEE--
WHAT GIVES THEE RIGHT TO CALL THYSELF HILDEGARDE?

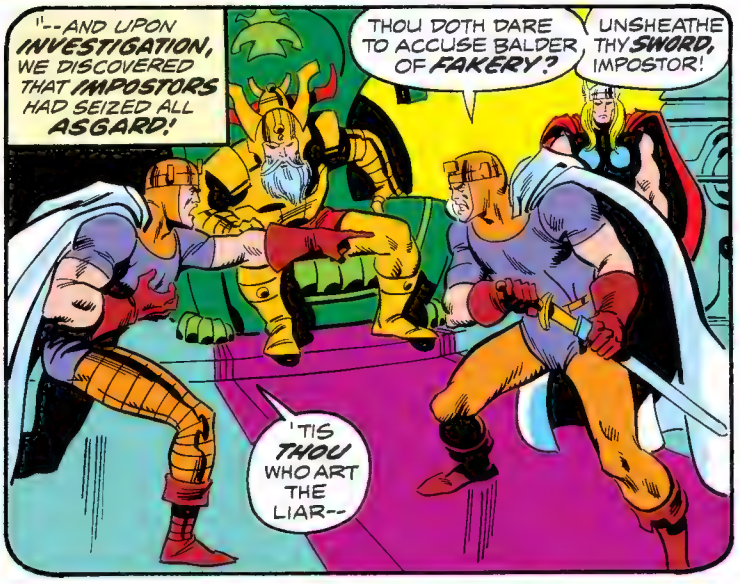
KRUMP!
THIS, FALSE LADY SIF!
THIS!


AT THAT MOMENT, IN A GLADE NOT FAR FROM THE SOUNDS OF BATTLE...
THIS FIGHTING FRIGHTENS ME... I UNDERSTAND NOT ITS MEANING!
IS IT NOT MADNESS ENOUGH WHEN ENEMY BATTLES WITH ENEMY?
HOW MUCH MADDER IS IT--
--WHEN FATHER FIGHTS WITH SON?
'TIS MORE THAN THE MIND OF KRISTA CAN COMPREHEND--MORE, I THINK, THAN EVEN MY FATHER COULD EXPLAIN!
I MUST HIDE TILL 'TIS OVER...
PERHAPS HERE IN THE WEST WOODS I MAY... BUT HOLD.
WHAT MIRACLE IS THIS?
BEFORE ME ON THE SLOPE... A GLOWING STONE.
NAY, 'TIS MORE THAN A STONE. 'TIS UNLIKE ANY STONE KRISTA HAS EVER SEEN...
PATTERNS: THERE ARE PATTERNS AND PLANS IN ALL THINGS, THOUGH PERHAPS NOT IMMEDIATELY APPARENT. SO TOO THERE IS A PURPOSE IN THE SCENE WE HAVE JUST WITNESSED--WHICH WILL BECOME CLEAR AT SOME OTHER TIME.
FOR NOW, LET'S RETURN TO OUR HEROES--AND ONE HERO IN PARTICULAR: FANDRAL, HE OF THE FLASHING BLADE!
HAVE AT YE, VARLETS!
PRESS ME BACK ALL THOU WILT, UNTIL I MAY STRIKE--SO!
EH? SOME MOUNTAINOUS FORM BEHIND ME?
THOU TOO SHALT FACE FANDRAL'S STEEL, OAF--!
'TIS A PROMISE I MEAN TO--WHAT IN THE NAME OF HADES?

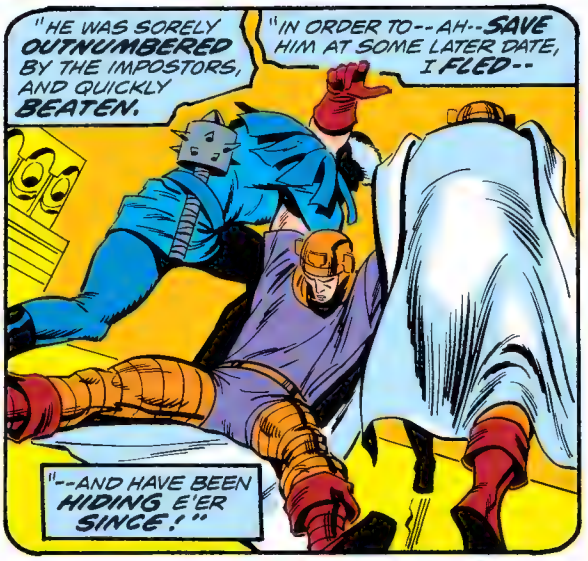

VOLSTAGG! HOW DOST THOU COME HERE, VOLUMINOUS ONE? LAST WE SAW OF THEE, THOU DIDST GUARD OUR BRAVE FRIEND BALDER--
--AND WAS THIS NOT UPON EARTH-- AND WAS NOT BALDER STRICKEN WITH INSANITY?
AYE... SO 'TWAS. BUT BALDER DID RECOVER... AND WAS INSANE NO LONGER!


MY FRIEND, 'TIS A MIRACLE I STAND BEFORE THEE TODAY-- A FINE FIGURE OF COURAGE AND LOYALTY!
AGAINST MY BETTER JUDGEMENT, I FOLLOWED OUR BROTHER-IN-ARMS HOME TO ASGARD-- FOR HE SOUGHT THEE AND THOR, TO AID IN THY HUNT FOR SIF*--
* THOR #213. --RT.


"AT FIRST WE THOUGHT THE REALM STILL EMPTY-- FOR WHEN LAST BALDER WALKED THE GOLDEN STREETS, THEY WERE DESERTED*--
"THEN, WE HEARD VOICES FROM THE PALACE--
* THOR #212. --RT.

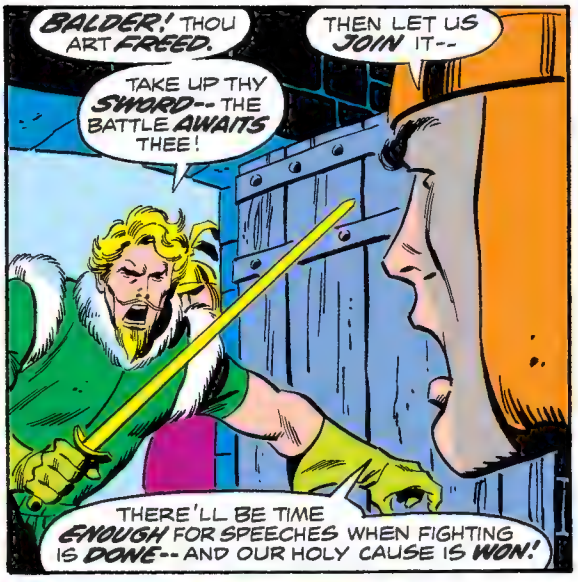

"--AND UPON INVESTIGATION, WE DISCOVERED THAT IMPOSTORS HAD SEIZED ALL ASGARD!
THOU DOTH DARE TO ACCUSE BALDER OF FAKERY?
UNSHEATHE THY SWORD, IMPOSTOR!
'TIS THOU WHO ART THE LIAR--

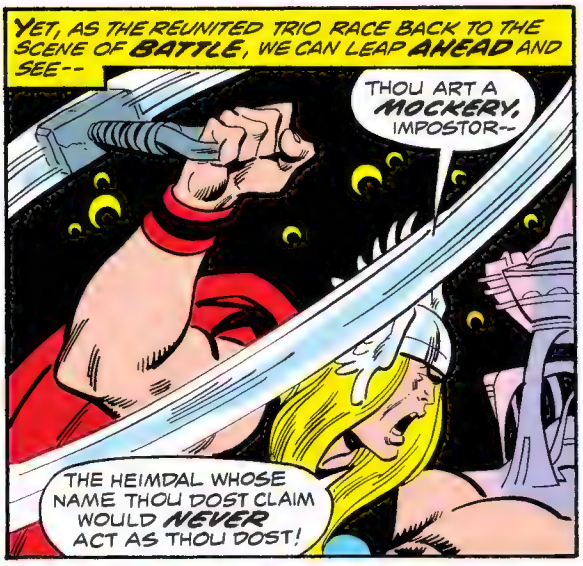
--AND 'TIS THOU WHO SHALT PERISH BY BALDER'S BLADE!

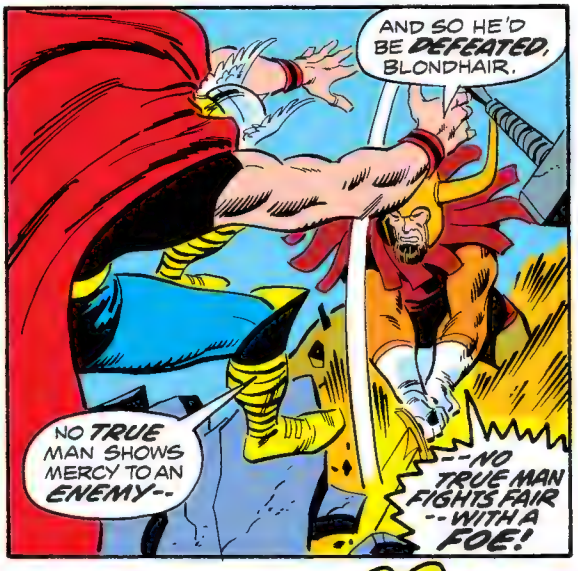

"HE WAS SORELY OUTNUMBERED BY THE IMPOSTORS, AND QUICKLY BEATEN.
"IN ORDER TO-- AH-- SAVE HIM AT SOME LATER DATE, I FLED--
"--AND HAVE BEEN HIDING E'ER SINCE!"

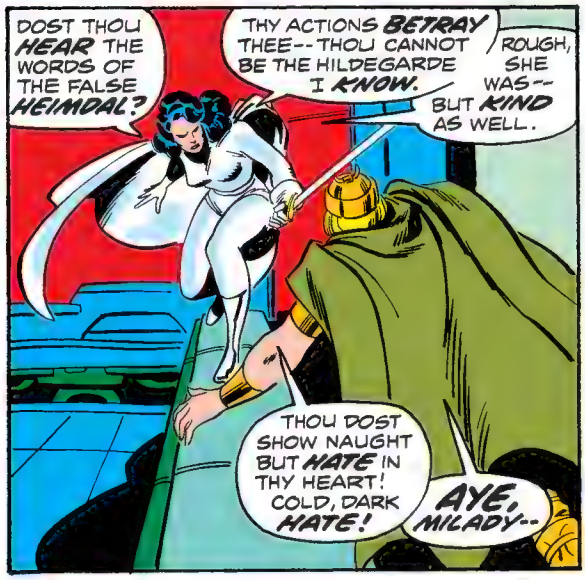
AND THOU HAST DONE NOTHING TO SAVE HIM THIS PAST FORTNIGHT?
VERILY, 'TWAS ALL I COULD DO TO RESTRAIN MYSELF.
THOU HAST SUCCEEDED ADMIRABLY, FAT ONE. WHERE IS OUR COMRADE?
IN THE DUNGEONS BELOW, I WAS ABOUT TO HIE TO HIS RESCUE WHEN THOU--
ENOUGH TALK, MY LARGE FRIEND.
'TIS TIME WE ACTED INSTEAD!
STAY BEHIND ME, FRIEND VOLSTAGG. I'LL NOT HAVE THY SHADOW BLOCKING MY--
STARS OF THE DARK NEBULA!
DEMON HOUNDS OF HELL!
BACK, VILE ONES-- OR TASTE COLD STEEL!
HA! DANCE, MY LADS--
DANCE ON FANDRAL'S SWORD!
BRAVE WORK, FAIR FANDRAL!
WHILST THOU DOST DISPATCH THESE BEASTS, IT FALLS TO ME TO PROTECT THE REAR--
A CHARGE I MOST WILLFULLY--
YAAAAAAAH!
HOUNDS! I'M STRUCK!
KRUMP!

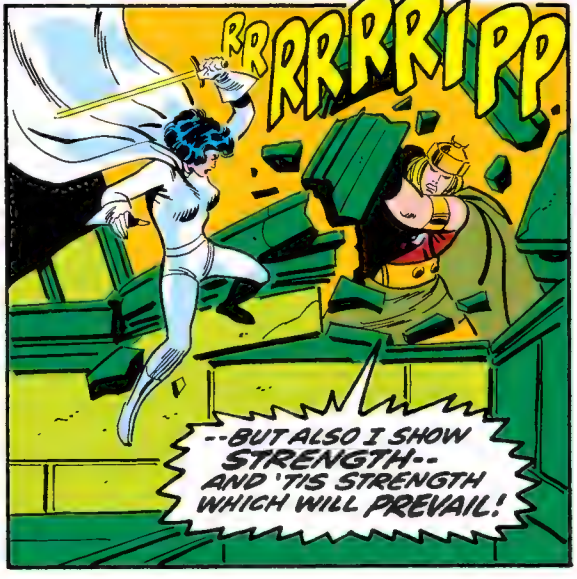
AND IT APPEARS THOU DOST STRIKE WELL IN TURN, VAST ONE.
DIDST THOU THINK I WOULD DO OTHER-WISE?
NOT FOR NAUGHT AM I KNOWN AS VOLSTAGG-- THE TRIUMPHANT!
AH. I SEE OUR LITTLE SEARCH IS OVER--


BALDER! THOU ART FREED.
THEN LET US JOIN IT--
TAKE UP THY SWORD-- THE BATTLE AWAITS THEE!
THERE'LL BE TIME ENOUGH FOR SPEECHES WHEN FIGHTING IS DONE-- AND OUR HOLY CAUSE IS WON!


YET, AS THE REUNITED TRIO RACE BACK TO THE SCENE OF BATTLE, WE CAN LEAP AHEAD AND SEE--
THOU ART A MOCKERY, IMPOSTOR--
THE HEIMDAL WHOSE NAME THOU DOST CLAIM WOULD NEVER ACT AS THOU DOST!


AND SO HE'D BE DEFEATED, BLONDHAIR.
NO TRUE MAN SHOWS MERCY TO AN ENEMY--
--NO TRUE MAN FIGHTS FAIR --WITH A FOE!


DOST THOU HEAR THE WORDS OF THE FALSE HEIMDAL?
THY ACTIONS BETRAY THEE-- THOU CANNOT BE THE HILDEGARDE I KNOW.
ROUGH, SHE WAS-- BUT KIND AS WELL.
THOU DOST SHOW NAUGHT BUT HATE IN THY HEART! COLD, DARK HATE!
AYE, MILADY--


RRRRIPP
--BUT ALSO I SHOW STRENGTH-- AND 'TIS STRENGTH WHICH WILL PREVAIL!

PERHAPS NOT, WITCH-IMPOSTOR!
WIT MAY ALSO WIN-- WHEN WIT IS TURNED 'GAINST THE LIKES OF THEE!
FATHER ODIN-- RELEASE THY RESTRAINING BARRIER!
LET THE BATTLE-BOLD WARRIORS OF ASGARD IN!
AT ONCE, THE LIEGE OF ASGARD COMPREHENDS THE LADY'S MEANING--
--THAT A FIGHT SO EVENLY MATCHED CANNOT BE WON BY ONE PARTY ALONE-- UNLESS THE FIGHT IS MADE CONFUSED BY THE ADDITION OF OTHERS-- OTHERS SUCH AS THESE!
WITH A SHOUT, THE BEWILDERED WARRIORS SURGE THROUGH THE COLLAPSING BARRIER-- CHARGING TO THE AID OF--WHOM?
NOW, USURPER FROM SPACE!
FACE HEIMDAL'S WRATH AS--
CRUMPO!
--AND 'TIS MJOLNIR WHICH HATH BROUGHT FORTH THY DOOM!
NO! I DRIFT FROM THE RAINBOW BRIDGE!
ALREADY, I FEEL THE CHANGE BEGINNING!
THOU FORGETS, DEMON-- 'TIS NOT MY MIRROR IMAGE THOU DOST FACE!
'TIS THOR-- AND THOR DOTH POSSESS THE MYSTIC MALLET--

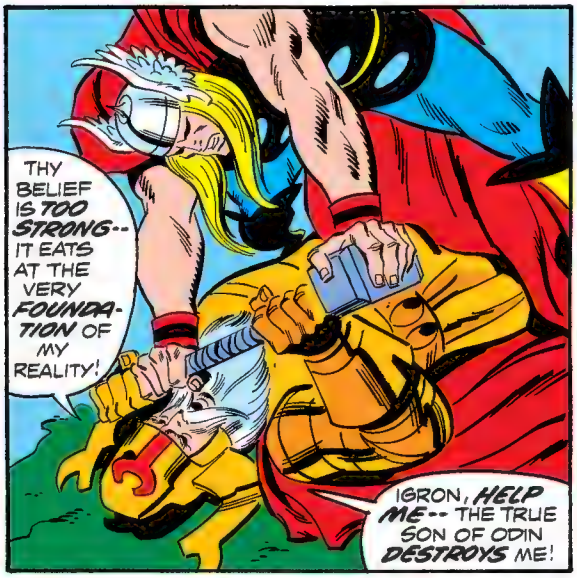
'TIS AS THE WIZARD WARNED! IF E'ER WE STEP FROM THE REALM OF ASGARD--THE SPELL BINDING US WILL SURELY DISSOLVE!
HELP ME, THOR--I ADMIT THY TRUE IDENTITY!
HELP ME--
HELP ME, BEFORE I FADE--AND CAN WALK THE WORLDS OF GODS AND MEN--
NO MORRRREEEE...
SPELLS AND WIZARDS? THEN 'TIS INDEED TRICKERY--AND MAYHAP TREASON AS WELL!
I MUST RETURN TO THE STREETS OF THE REALM--
KRUNCH!
--FOR ONLY THERE WILL I FIND SHE WHO HOLDS MY HEART, SHE WHO MUST ACCOMPANY ME ON THIS MOST IMPORTANT SEARCH--
MILADY SIF! ART THOU WELL?
I FEARED THOU WOULDST FARE BADLY!
I AM A WOMAN, MILORD--
--NOT A WEAKLING. I WOULD HAVE SURVIVED, I THINK.
'TIS GOOD TO HEAR, MILADY, IT DOTH CLEAR MY MIND FOR OTHER THINGS--BUT WAIT!
IS THAT NOT BALDER UPON YON ROOF?
AND SHOULD NOT BALDER BE ON EARTH?

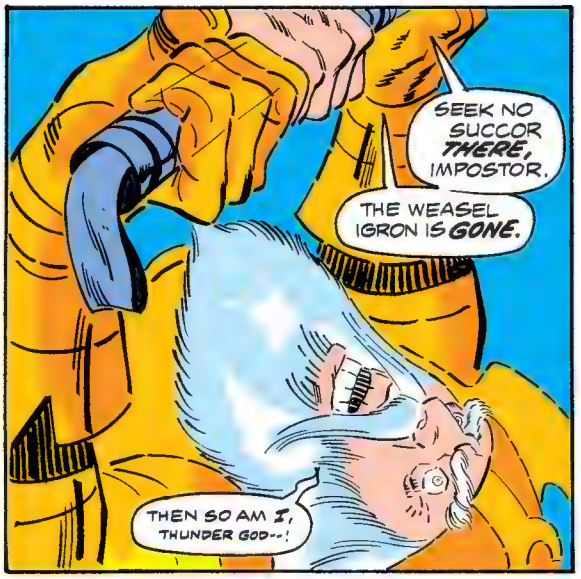
'TIS A MATTER WORTH STUDYING.
HO, BALDER-- WHAT DO THEE HERE?
I SEARCH FOR THEE, MILORD THOR... AND NOW THAT I HAVE FOUND THEE, THERE IS MUCH WHICH I MUST EXPLAIN.
BUT FIRST... WE MUST BE MADE MORE COMFORTABLE--
SO!
RRUMMMMM
BALDER-- HAST THOU GONE FULLY MAD?
THESE WALLS, RISING FROM THE ROOFTOP AROUND US--! WHAT--?
RUMBLE-THUMP!
JUST A SIMPLE SPELL, "MILORD"--
AN EXCEEDINGLY SIMPLE SPELL--
--FOR A WIZARD TRAINED BY THE HAND OF THY ARCH-ENEMY-- LOKI!
I REFER OF COURSE--TO MYSELF.
IGRON, THE INVINCIBLE!
LORD OF THE DARK DOMAIN!
THOU DOST SEEM SURPRISED, ASGARDIAN... AND WELL THOU SHOULDST BE.
FOR CENTURIES I ACTED THE PART OF THE FOOL, I PLAYED THE SERVANT TO THY HALF-BROTHER, THE GOD OF MISCHIEF.
NOW OUR PARTS ARE REVERSED, FOR LOKI IS GONE FROM ASGARD--
--AND IGRON IS ITS MASTER!
THOU ART MAD. WHAT DOST THOU MEAN-- HOW ART THOU MY HOMELAND'S MASTER?
LISTEN, ODINSON... AND I WILL TELL THEE.
AND THOU SHALT KNOW... IGRON IS THE GREATEST SORCERER OF ALL!

IT BEGAN WHEN LOKI BECAME DISPLEASED WITH MY AMBITION--AND DETERMINED TO "REWARD" ME WITH A FATE MOST FOUL, AS SLAVE TO THE DARK-HEARTED TROLLS! *
* IT HAPPENED IN THOR #179. --RT.
FOR MONTHS THAT SEEMED TO BORDER ON YEARS, I LABORED UNDER THEIR CRUEL COMMAND...
...AND AS I SLAVED, I PLOTTED... AND SEETHED WITH A BURNING RAGE!
AT LAST, MY MOMENT TO ESCAPE ARRIVED-- IN A MANNER MOST IRONIC. 'TWAS WHEN THOU DIDST BATTLE ULIK, THEN-LEADER OF THE TROLL ARMIES*-- TRYING TO STOP HIM FROM ATTACKING EARTH.
*THOR #210, 211. --RT.
"SEIZING UPON MY CAPTORS' MOMENTARY DISTRACTION, I WORKED A SPELL UPON MY BONDS-- A SPELL WHICH IT HAD TAKEN ME MANY WEEKS TO DEVISE.
"NATURALLY IT SUCCEEDED... AND I WAS FREE...
"WITHIN THE HOUR, I RETURNED TO ASGARD, HOPING TO MAKE USE OF MY MANY MONTHS OF PLANNING...
"I DISCOVERED MYSELF ALONE; FOR IT WAS DURING THAT TIME THAT ODIN AND THE WARRIORS OF ASGARD WERE CAPTURED! *
*#212, 213--RT.
"DAYS PASSED... FINALLY, THE WARRIORS APPEARED... WITHOUT THEE OR THY FELLOW NOBLES.
"I LATER LEARNED THOU WERT ELSE-WHERE *--
*214-216. --RT.
"--BUT AT THE MOMENT IT SCARCELY MATTERED. I HAD A NEW PLAN--A FAR MORE DIABOLICAL ONE.
"I ACTED IMMEDIATELY..

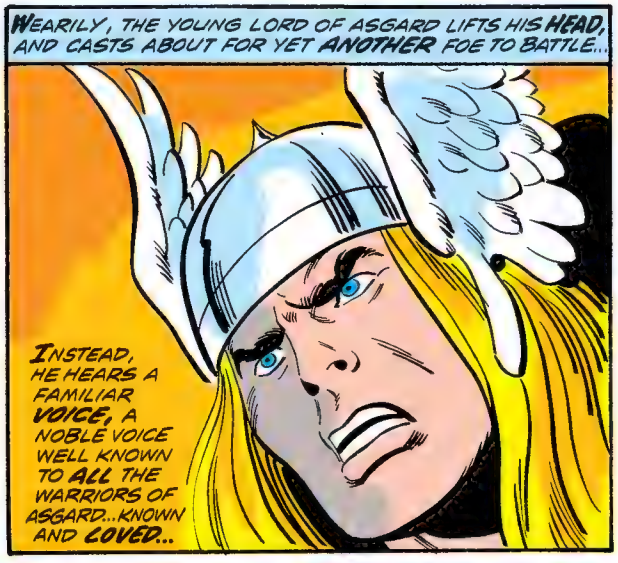
"IN ALL MEN AND ALL GODS, THERE IS A NEED TO BELIEVE IN SOMETHING GREATER -- A POWER ABOVE OUR OWN. THAT NEED TO BELIEVE IS A WORTHY ENERGY, MY LORD THOR --
"--AN ENERGY SURPASSING ANY FORCE KNOWN TO GOD OR MAN!
"TAPPING THAT POWER THAT WILL TO BELIEVE IN THE WARRIORS OF ASGARD, I CREATED MY OWN LORDS AND LADIES OF ASGARD -- AND AS LONG AS THEY REMAINED ON ASGARD, AND REMAINED OBEDIENT TO ME -- I GAVE THEM LIFE AND BREATH!"
FOR HAS NOT A MORTAL SAGE OF EARTH WRITTEN -- "IF GOD DID NOT EXIST, MAN WOULD CREATE HIM?"
AND IS THIS NOT WHAT I HAVE DONE -- I, IGRON THE INVINCIBLE!
MASTER OF ASGARD -- AND SOON LORD OF THE DARK DOMAN!
EXCELLENT, THUNDER GOD -- SUPERB!
STRUGGLE ALL THOU WILT --
-- THY STRUGGLE IS FUTILE!
IGRON IS THE MASTER! IGRON IS SUPRE-
MEEEEEEEE!
KLANK!
WELL STRUCK, BRAVE BALDER, IT APPEARS OUR FRIEND SPOKE TOO MUCH --
AND LISTENED BEHIND HIM ALL TOO LITTLE!
MY FRIENDS, THOU ART A HAPPY SIGHT... AND THOU HAST ARRIVED AT JUST THE PROPER MOMENT.
LATER SHALL WE TALK -- AND BALDER MAY REVEAL WHY HE HAST COME TO ASGARD.
NOW, HOWEVER -- THE WIZARD'S SPELL CRUMBLES --

--AND SO 'TIS TIME WE DO RETURN TO BATTLE, AND SOMEHOW USE WHAT KNOWLEDGE WE'VE GAINED--TO DISPATCH OUR MIRRORED FOES!
SO WE SHALL, MILORD--
--IF E'ER VOLSTAGG DOTH REMOVE HIS BULK FROM MY SHOULDER!
OFF ME, THOU BLOODY OAF!
FANDRAL, BALDER AND VOLSTAGG--HIE THEE TO THE SIDE OF TANA NILE AND SILAS GRANT!
I SHALL SEEK OUT THE FALSE ODIN--
THIS DAY--JUSTICE SHALL BE MET AND DONE!
THEN LET IT BE DONE QUICKLY, MILORD THOR!
THE SOLDIERS OF ASGARD THINK US THE IMPOSTORS--AND FIGHT LIKE DEMONS AT BAY!
SO! THOU DOTH THINK TO BATTLE ODIN--
ODIN, WHOSE STRENGTH EXCEEDS THY OWN--WHOSE POWER IS GREAT ENOW TO TOPPLE WORLDS!
SUCH IS TRUE OF MY FATHER...
BUT NAY, NOT TRUE OF THEE!
THE TRUE ODIN DIDST GIVE ME THE MALLET MJOLNIR--DIDST BLESS IT WITH HIS HAND AND IMPART TO IT HIS STRENGTH!
NONE BUT HE MAY TRULY STAND AGAINST IT--!
FOR ITS HOLDER IS THOR, GOD OF THUNDER--
--PROTECTOR OF THE ETERNAL REALM!
SPAK!

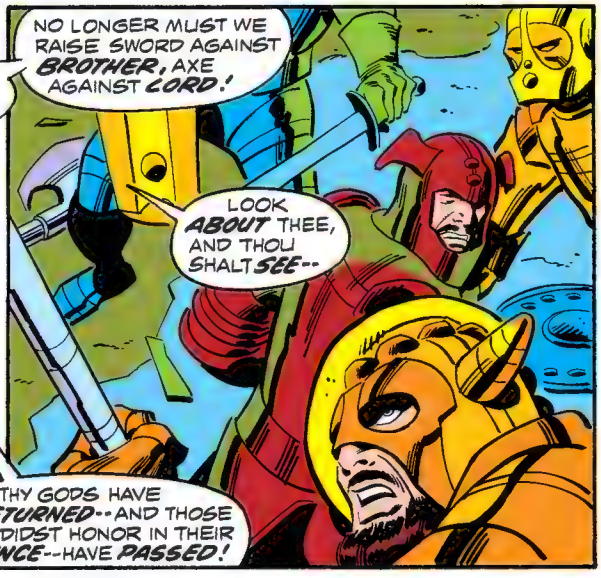

THY BELIEF IS TOO STRONG-- IT EATS AT THE VERY FOUNDATION OF MY REALITY!
IGRON, HELP ME-- THE TRUE SON OF ODIN DESTROYS ME!


SEEK NO SUCCOR THERE, IMPOSTOR.
THE WEASEL IGRON IS GONE.
THEN SO AM I, THUNDER GOD--!

SO TOO AM I!!!!!!!!!


WEARILY, THE YOUNG LORD OF ASGARD LIFTS HIS HEAD, AND CASTS ABOUT FOR YET ANOTHER FOE TO BATTLE...
INSTEAD, HE HEARS A FAMILIAR VOICE, A NOBLE VOICE WELL KNOWN TO ALL THE WARRIORS OF ASGARD...KNOWN AND LOVED...

...FOR THE SPEAKER IS BALDER, CALLED THE BRAVE!
FELLOW ASGARDIANS... I BEG THEE, DESIST!
THIS BATTLE IS OVER...


NO LONGER MUST WE RAISE SWORD AGAINST BROTHER, AXE AGAINST LORD!
LOOK ABOUT THEE, AND THOU SHALT SEE--
THY GODS HAVE RETURNED--AND THOSE THOU DIDST HONOR IN THEIR ABSENCE--HAVE PASSED!

THE BRAVE ONE SPEAKS WITH WISDOM.
TOO MANY HAVE BEEN WOUNDED-- IN DEFENSE OF THESE ELUSIVE LORDS.
EVEN NOW, AS BALDER SPEAKS, THE SOLDIERS TURN FROM THEIR FALSE BELIEFS--
--AND THE FALSE GODS FADE--
--AS THOUGH THEY NEVER WERE.
LET THIS BE THE LESSON WE HAVE HERE LEARNED:
BE WARY WHAT GODS THOU DOST GIVE THY LIEGANCE TO--
--FOR BELIEF IS ALL TOO EASILY USED AGAINST THEE--
--AND FAITH CAN SEED A MOST BLOODY FRUIT!
HAIL ODIN THE TRUE LORD OF ASGARD!
AND SO ONE BATTLE ENDS... BUT IN THE AFTERMATH, A FEW SHORT HOURS LATER, ANOTHER BATTLE FINDS A GRIM BEGINNING...
WHY DOES HE SEND FOR US?
ARE YOU SURE HE WANTED SILAS AND I AS WELL AS YOU AND LADY SIF?
SO THE MESSAGE SAID.
IN A MOMENT-- WE SHALL KNOW WHY.
MY SON, I HAVE GRIM NEWS.
IT AFFECTS ASGARD--AND ALL THE CIVILIZED PLANETS IN THIS GALAXY.
WHILE WE STRUGGLED TO REGAIN OUR LAND, A MENACE HAS BEEN APPROACHING FROM THE DEPTHS OF SPACE--
--A MENACE WHICH SHALL FIRST DESTROY THE WORLD OF THE COLONIZERS--
--AND THEN... ALL THE WORLDS OF MEN!
NEXT: THE MENACE FROM BEYOND!

THOR
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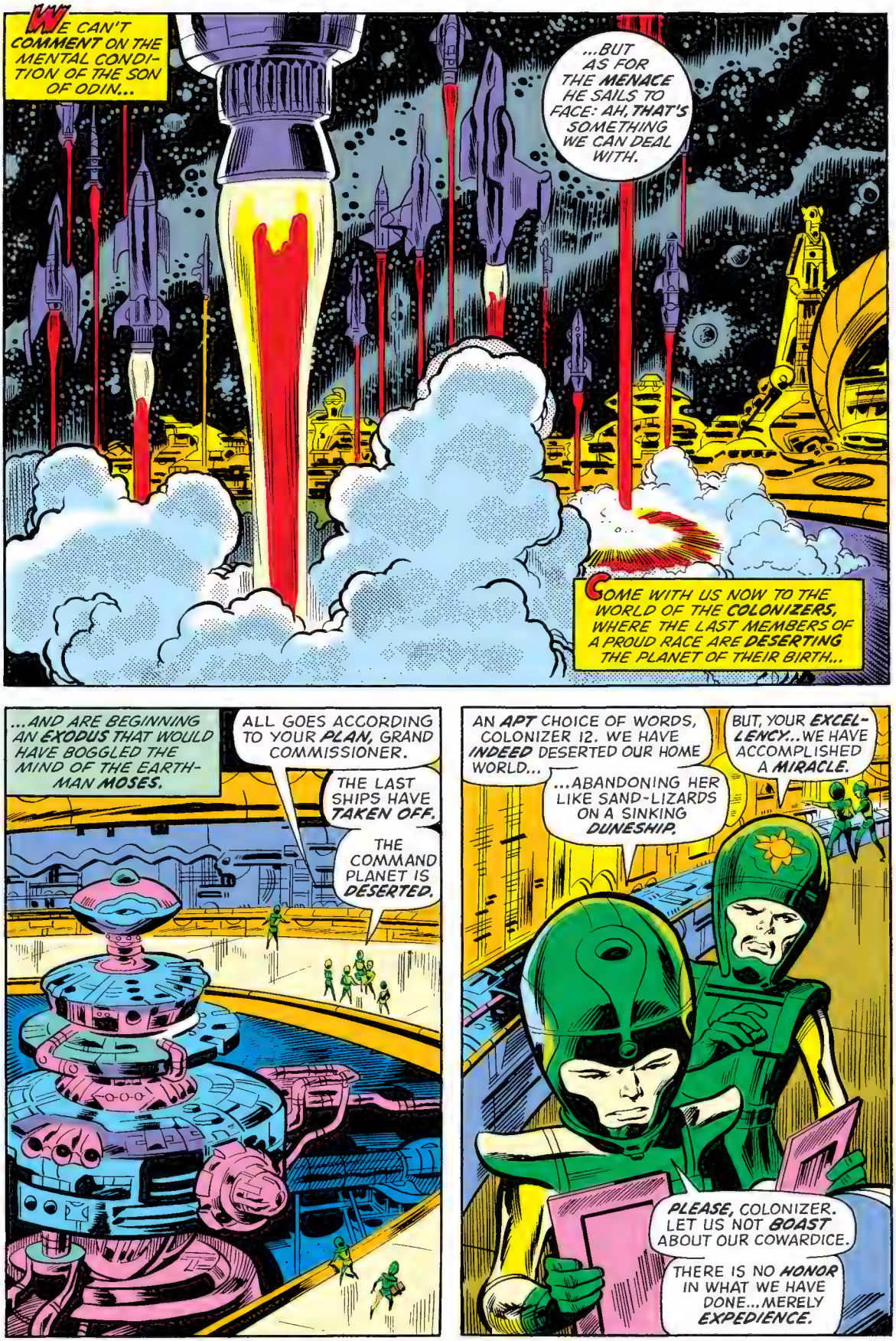
THE MIGHTY
THOR®
FIGHTS ALONE!
IF THOR SHOULD FALL-- A WORLD MUST DIE!
BUT NONE SHOULD SLAY A GOD!
WHAT MONSTROUS SECRET LIES BEYOND
THE 5 PLANETS OF DEATH!

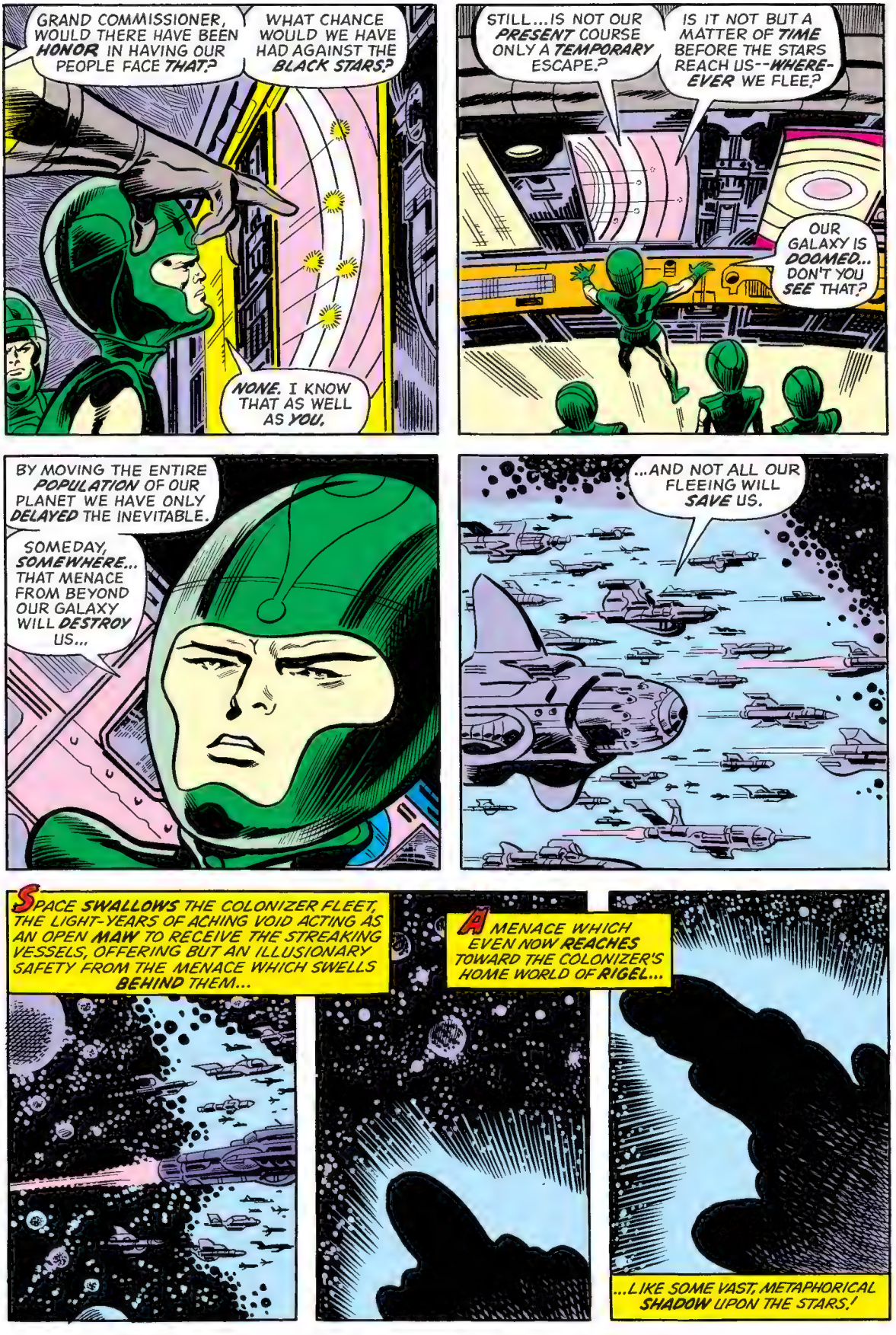
Stan Lee Presents: THE MIGHTY THOR!™

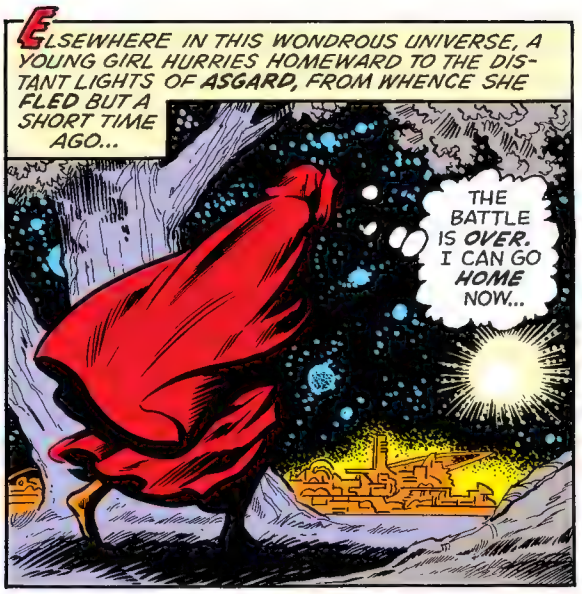
GERRY CONWAY, WRITER * JOHN BUSCEMA, ARTIST * JIM MOONEY, INKER * ARTIE SIMEK, LETTERER G. ROUSSOS, COLORIST * ROY THOMAS, EDITOR

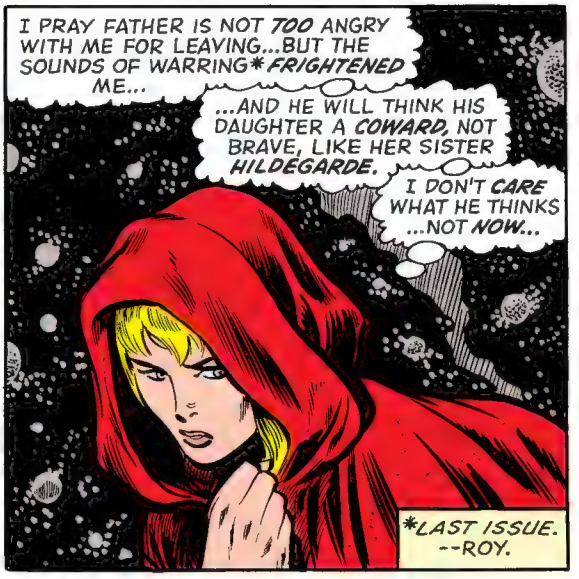
HEADS HELD HIGH, THEY WALK PROUDLY FROM THE CASTLE-KEEP OF THE ALL-FATHER, ODIN... YET IN THEIR EYES WISE MEN MIGHT SEE FEAR, FOR IN TRUTH, THESE BRAVE MEN AND WOMEN WALK FORWARD TO MEET...THE UNKNOWN!
ODIN HATH COMMANDED US TO SEEK OUT THE PLANET OF TANA NILE'S PEOPLE... THE DISTANT HOME OF THE RACE OF COLONIZERS...
...THE WORLD CALLED RIGEL.
AND IF THAT'S WHAT YOUR FATHER WANTS, THOR...
THEN THAT'S WHAT WE'LL BLOODY WELL DO!
TO RIGEL... AND IF 'TIS THERE THAT THOR DOTH GO...
...THEN 'TIS THERE THAT SIF SHALL GO AS WELL!
(AND IF YOU THINK WE'RE GOING TO CLUTTER UP A SPLASH-PAGE LIKE THIS WITH A TITLE...YOU'VE GOT ANOTHER THINK COMING,! ONWARD, FRANTIC ONE--THE GRANDEUR'S ABOUT TO BEGIN!--R.T.)

WHAT OF OUR FELLOWS, MILORD? WILL THEY ACCOMPANY US ON THIS MOST MYSTERIOUS QUEST?
NAY. 'TIS TOO DANGEROUS... AND ODIN HATH COMMANDED, NONE BUT WE MAY CHANCE SUCH A VOYAGE.
WAIT, MILORD THOR... SURELY THOU WILT RECONSIDER.
WHAT OF BALDER--
--HE WHO HATH SHARED THY TROUBLES, WHO HATH BEEN THY CLOSEST FRIEND, FAIR WEATHER AND FOUL.
WILT THOU NOT LET HIM SHARE THIS BATTLE ALSO?
HOW COULD I DENY THEE, BRAVE ONE? SO BE IT.
WE SHALL BE FIVE...
...AGAINST A MADNESS OF WHICH I DARE NOT SPEAK.
THEN LET US BE OFF, MILORD.
WHAT E'ER DANGER STANDS BEFORE US, MY LIEGE--
--WE SHALL FACE THAT DANGER AS TRUE ASGARDIANS BORN!
THEY ARE BRAVE, VIZIER... BRAVER THAN ANY GODS BEFORE THEM, OR ANY WHO WILL COME AFTER, I THINK.
WOULD THAT I COULD SAIL WITH THEM... BUT ASGARD HOLDS ME.
THERE IS MUCH WHICH MUST BE DONE ...FOR US TO MEET THIS NEW CRISIS.
THEY KNOW THY HEART GOES WITH THEM, LORD ODIN.
DO THEY, VIZIER? I PRAY IT IS SO.
FOR 'TWAS NOT SO LONG AGO MY SON AND I WERE ENEMIES SWORN.
I HOPE THAT I HAVE NOT SENT HIM TO SUCH A TERROR...WITH ENMITY STILL BURNING IN HIS BREAST.
'TWOULD BE TOO GREAT AN IRONY FOR THIS ELDER GOD'S MIND TO BEAR.

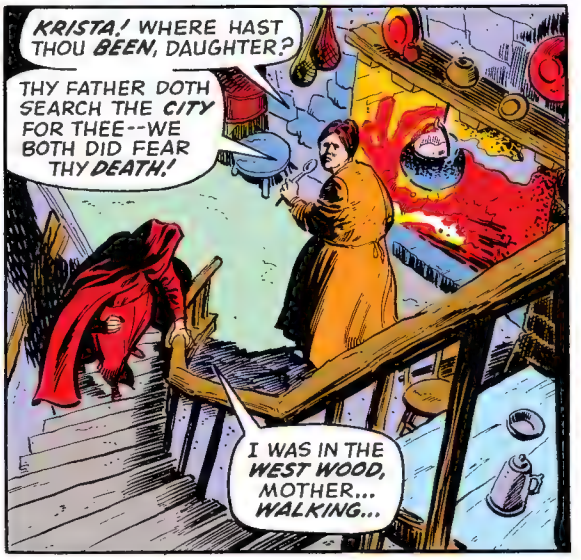

WE CAN'T COMMENT ON THE MENTAL CONDITION OF THE SON OF ODIN...
...BUT AS FOR THE MENACE HE SAILS TO FACE: AH, THAT'S SOMETHING WE CAN DEAL WITH.
COME WITH US NOW TO THE WORLD OF THE COLONIZERS, WHERE THE LAST MEMBERS OF A PROUD RACE ARE DESERTING THE PLANET OF THEIR BIRTH...
...AND ARE BEGINNING AN EXODUS THAT WOULD HAVE BOGGLED THE MIND OF THE EARTHMAN MOSES.
ALL GOES ACCORDING TO YOUR PLAN, GRAND COMMISSIONER.
THE LAST SHIPS HAVE TAKEN OFF.
THE COMMAND PLANET IS DESERTED.
AN APT CHOICE OF WORDS, COLONIZER 12. WE HAVE INDEED DESERTED OUR HOME WORLD...
...ABANDONING HER LIKE SAND-LIZARDS ON A SINKING DUNESHIP.
BUT, YOUR EXCELLENCY...WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED A MIRACLE.
PLEASE, COLONIZER. LET US NOT BOAST ABOUT OUR COWARDICE.
THERE IS NO HONOR IN WHAT WE HAVE DONE...MERELY EXPEDIENCE.


GRAND COMMISSIONER, WOULD THERE HAVE BEEN HONOR IN HAVING OUR PEOPLE FACE THAT?
WHAT CHANCE WOULD WE HAVE HAD AGAINST THE BLACK STARS?
NONE. I KNOW THAT AS WELL AS YOU.
STILL...IS NOT OUR PRESENT COURSE ONLY A TEMPORARY ESCAPE?
IS IT NOT BUT A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THE STARS REACH US--WHEREEVER WE FLEE?
OUR GALAXY IS DOOMED... DON'T YOU SEE THAT?
BY MOVING THE ENTIRE POPULATION OF OUR PLANET WE HAVE ONLY DELAYED THE INEVITABLE.
SOMEDAY, SOMEWHERE... THAT MENACE FROM BEYOND OUR GALAXY WILL DESTROY US...
...AND NOT ALL OUR FLEEING WILL SAVE US.
SPACE SWALLOWS THE COLONIZER FLEET, THE LIGHT-YEARS OF ACHING VOID ACTING AS AN OPEN MAW TO RECEIVE THE STREAKING VESSELS, OFFERING BUT AN ILLUSIONARY SAFETY FROM THE MENACE WHICH SWELLS BEHIND THEM...
A MENACE WHICH EVEN NOW REACHES TOWARD THE COLONIZER'S HOME WORLD OF RIGEL...
...LIKE SOME VAST, METAPHORICAL SHADOW UPON THE STARS!


ELSEWHERE IN THIS WONDROUS UNIVERSE, A YOUNG GIRL HURRIES HOMEWARD TO THE DISTANT LIGHTS OF ASGARD, FROM WHENCE SHE FLED BUT A SHORT TIME AGO...
THE BATTLE IS OVER. I CAN GO HOME NOW...


I PRAY FATHER IS NOT TOO ANGRY WITH ME FOR LEAVING...BUT THE SOUNDS OF WARRING* FRIGHTENED ME...
...AND HE WILL THINK HIS DAUGHTER A COWARD, NOT BRAVE, LIKE HER SISTER HILDEGARDE.
I DON'T CARE WHAT HE THINKS ...NOT NOW...
*LAST ISSUE. --ROY.

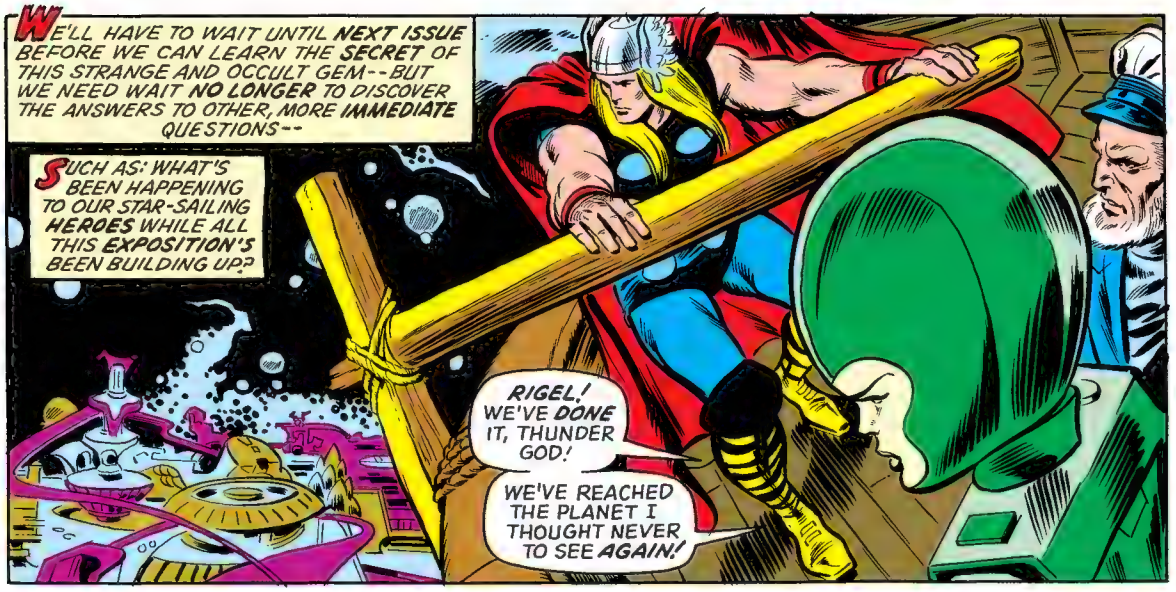
...NOW THAT I HAVE THIS CHARMSTONE!

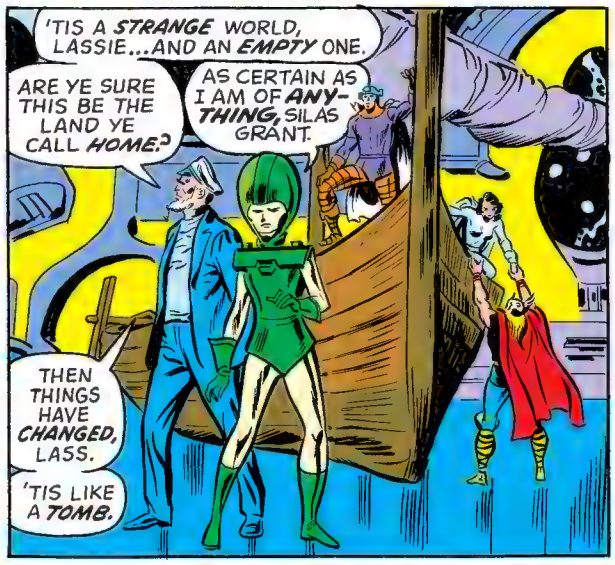

KRISTA! WHERE HAST THOU BEEN, DAUGHTER?
THY FATHER DOTH SEARCH THE CITY FOR THEE--WE BOTH DID FEAR THY DEATH!
I WAS IN THE WEST WOOD, MOTHER... WALKING...

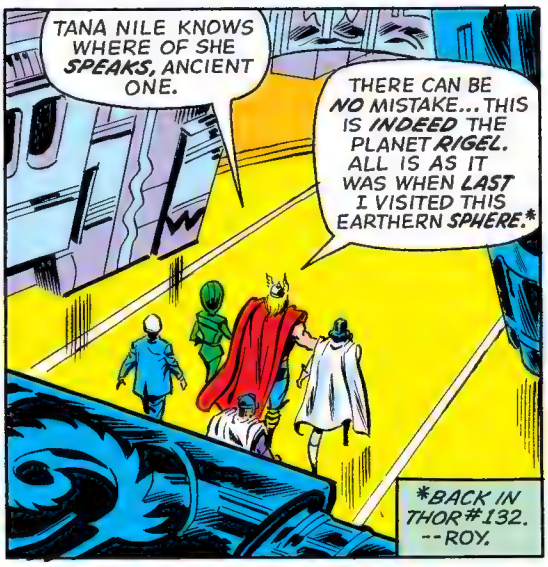
...AND THE TREK DID TIRE ME GREATLY. BY THY LEAVE, I WOULD REST THIS EVE.
TOMORROW I WILL TELL THEE ALL.

BUT HOW WILL I TELL HER OF THEE, JEWEL? HOW MAY I SAY I FOUND THEE, IN THE MIDST OF A FIELD...?
SURELY THEY WILL NOT BELIEVE ME. THEY WILL TAKE THEE FROM ME...
...AND SOMEHOW... I KNOW THIS MUST NOT BE!

THOU ART MINE, CHARMSTONE...AND MINE THOU SHALT REMAIN!
AND NO ONE WILL STEAL THEE-- EVER!
I WOULD KILL BEFORE I LET THEE GO!

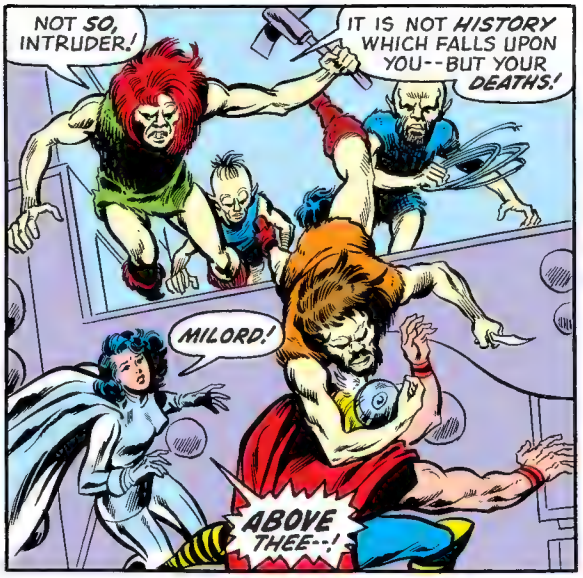

WE'LL HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL NEXT ISSUE BEFORE WE CAN LEARN THE SECRET OF THIS STRANGE AND OCCULT GEM--BUT WE NEED WAIT NO LONGER TO DISCOVER THE ANSWERS TO OTHER, MORE IMMEDIATE QUESTIONS--
SUCH AS: WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING TO OUR STAR-SAILING HEROES WHILE ALL THIS EXPOSITION'S BEEN BUILDING UP?
RIGEL! WE'VE DONE IT, THUNDER GOD!
WE'VE REACHED THE PLANET I THOUGHT NEVER TO SEE AGAIN!


'TIS A STRANGE WORLD, LASSIE...AND AN EMPTY ONE.
ARE YE SURE THIS BE THE LAND YE CALL HOME?
AS CERTAIN AS I AM OF ANY-THING, SILAS GRANT.
THEN THINGS HAVE CHANGED, LASS.
'TIS LIKE A TOMB.


TANA NILE KNOWS WHERE OF SHE SPEAKS, ANCIENT ONE.
THERE CAN BE NO MISTAKE... THIS IS INDEED THE PLANET RIGEL. ALL IS AS IT WAS WHEN LAST I VISITED THIS EARTHERN SPHERE.*
*BACK IN THOR #132. --ROY.

SAVE FOR ONE PROFOUND DIFFERENCE: WHERE ONCE TEAMED LIFE, THERE NOW IS ONLY DUST.
WHAT ODIN FEARED MUST HAVE COME TO PASS...

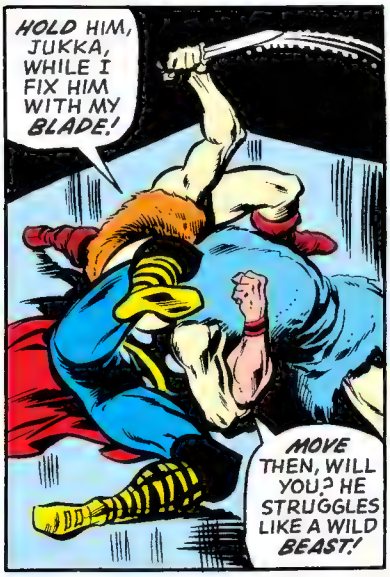
THE COLONIZERS HAVE LEFT THEIR WORLD...WHICH DOTH MEAN THE BLACK STARS CANNOT BE LONG IN COMING!
IF WHAT THE ALL-FATHER DID HINT IS TRUE...THE END OF HISTORY IS NIGH UPON US!

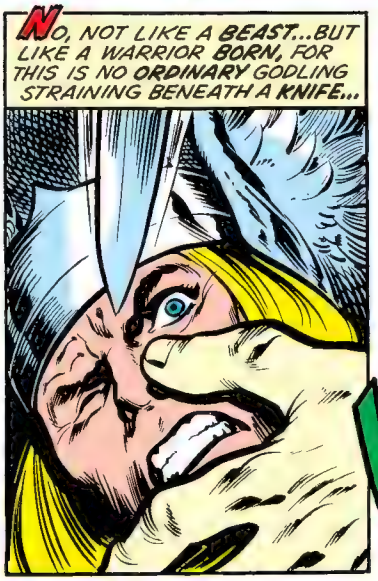

NOT SO, INTRUDER!
IT IS NOT HISTORY WHICH FALLS UPON YOU--BUT YOUR DEATHS!
MILORD!
ABOVE THEE--!

YOUR WARNING COMES TOO LATE, FEMALE.
THE ROPES OF BOLAA STRIKE QUICKLY--
--AND WELL!

SILAS, BEWARE! WE'VE FALLEN AFOUL OF THE MUTANT CLASS--THE UNDERGROUND DWELLERS OF RIGEL, CREATURES DEFORMED BOTH IN BODY--AND MIND!
I CAN SEE THAT, LASS--
TELL ME NOW WHAT I'M TO DO ABOUT IT! THEY'RE ALL AROUND US!

THAT WE ARE, OLD ONE. SURRENDER NOW, BEFORE THE AXE OF TRYX MAKES SHORT WORK OF YOU--
SPANNG!
--AFTER I DEFEAT THIS EAGER FEMALE!
IF THOU CAN, MUTANT! IF THOU CAN!


HOLD HIM, JUKKA, WHILE I FIX HIM WITH MY BLADE!
MOVE THEN, WILL YOU? HE STRUGGLES LIKE A WILD BEAST!


NO, NOT LIKE A BEAST...BUT LIKE A WARRIOR BORN, FOR THIS IS NO ORDINARY GODLING STRAINING BENEATH A KNIFE...

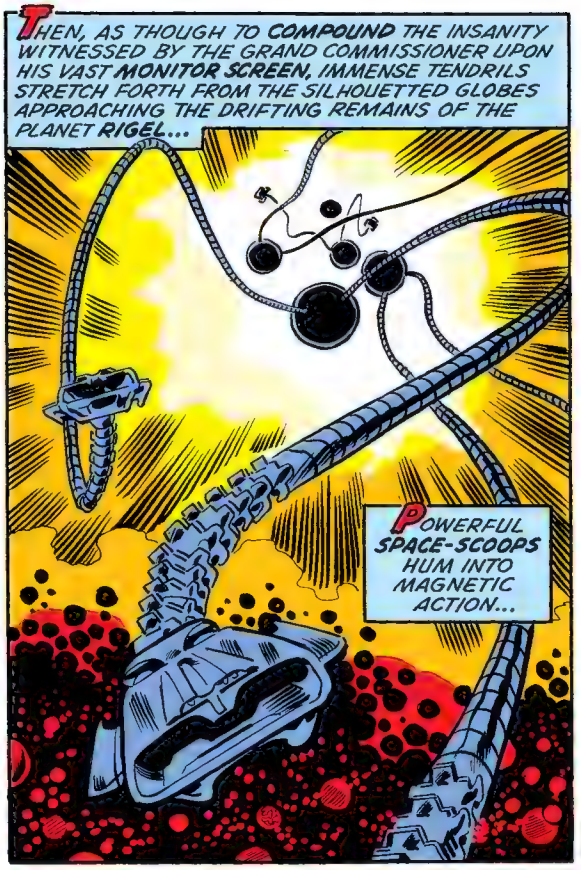
THIS IS THOR, GOD OF THUNDER!
WHAM!

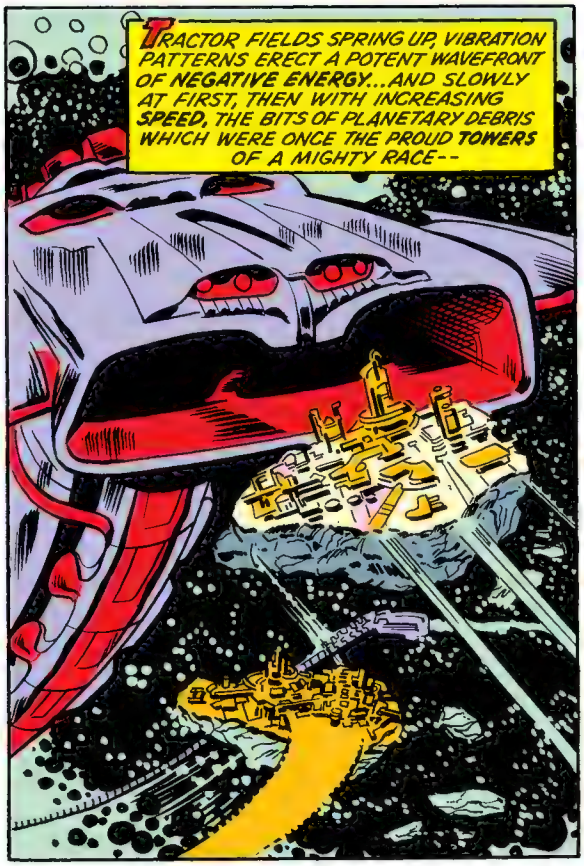
AND WHERE THOR STRIDES, THERE STRIDES THE SON OF ODIN...THE MASTER OF ALL THE COSMIC WINDS!
ENOUGH! I SAY THEE-- CEASE!
THIS BATTLE HAS NO MEANING... AND I WOULD LEARN THE REASON THOU CREATURES HAVE BEEN LEFT BEHIND!
I SAY THEE, LET THE FIGHTING BE STILLED!
SO SPEAKS THOR, AND SO DOTH HE ENFORCE HIS WILL--
--BY AID OF THE MYSTIC MALLET MJOLNIR!
WAAK!
CRUNCH!
SWANNG!
BY THE SILVER STAR, YOU ARE A WORTHY OPPONENT, BLONDHAIR.
STILL, WE MIGHT YET BEST YOU, CONSIDERING OUR ALIEN STRENGTH...
...BUT IT'S A BATTLE I'D RATHER AVOID... TO OUR, AH, MUTUAL BENEFIT.
WE'LL ACCEDE TO YOUR DEMAND, "THOR."
I, JUKKA, WILL TELL YOU WHAT YOU WISH TO KNOW.

IT'S AS THE COLONIZER FEMALE SAID: WE'RE OF THE MUTANT CLASS... A SUB-RACE OF THE COLONIZERS, CREATED IN THEIR GENE VATS...
...THE SURVIVORS OF A DOOMED EXPERIMENT, I'M SAD TO SAY.
OUR LORDS AND MASTERS CONSIDER US INFERIOR... AND SO WE WILL BE THE LAST OF OUR KIND, WITHOUT WOMEN, TO CARRY ON OUR SPECIES.
THE COLONIZERS LEFT US HERE TO DIE...
...WHILE THEY WENT ON TO ESCAPE THE THREAT OF THE BLACK STARS.
WE ATTACKED YOU BECAUSE WE WERE SICK WITH FEAR... WE WERE AFRAID TO MEET DEATH.
ALL MEN FEAR DEATH, JUKKA... AS DO ALL GODS, FOR SOMEDAY WE TOO MUST MAKE THE JOURNEY TO VALHALLA.
THOU WILL COME WITH US ABOARD THE STARJAMMER.
TOGETHER WE SHALL SEEK THY CREATORS, THE COLONIZERS...
...AND THEN PERHAPS LEARN THE MEANING OF THESE... BLACK STARS.
YOU ARE KIND, THOR. ALLOW US A MOMENT TO GATHER SPACESUITS, AND WE WILL JOIN YOU...
AND SO THE ASGARDIAN SPACE BOAT LIFTS STARWARD ONCE MORE, WHILE, AT THE FAR END OF ITS TRAIL...
...THE COLONIZERS WATCH THE APPROACHING DEATH OF THEIR BELOVED HOME WORLD.
YOUR EXCELLENCY... THE BLACK STARS!
SO IT SEEMS, COLONIZER 12.
DO YOU THINK THE LEGENDS ARE TRUE, GRAND COMMISSIONER?
WILL THE BLACK STARS... DEVOUR OUR PLANET?
I EXPECT WE SHALL SEE, COLONIZER 12.
AT THAT INSTANT, RAYS LANCE OUT FROM THE FIVE MYSTERIOUS OBJECTS UPON THE SCREEN--
--AND ON A PLANET RECENTLY ABANDONED--

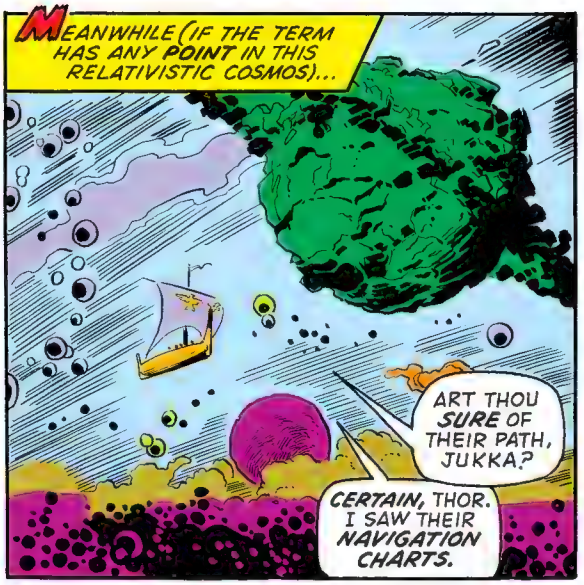
..ALL COSMIC HELL BREAKS LOOSE!
AND IF YOU'VE BEEN WONDERING WHERE THE TITLE OF THIS TALE HAS BEEN HIDING, WONDER NO MORE, MAD ONE:
WHERE PASS THE BLACK STARS
THERE ALSO PASSES... DEATH!

SHATTERED BY MULTI-BLASTS OF COSMIC ENERGY, THE ONCE-MIGHTY HOME OF THE COLONIZERS BEGINS TO BREAK UP, WHOLE CITIES SPINNING INTO SPACE ON MILE-WIDE SHARDS OF STONE...

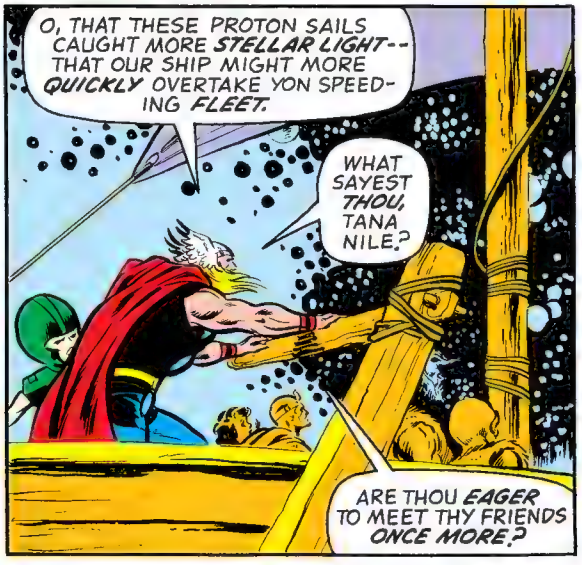

THEN, AS THOUGH TO COMPOUND THE INSANITY WITNESSED BY THE GRAND COMMISSIONER UPON HIS VAST MONITOR SCREEN, IMMENSE TENDRILS STRETCH FORTH FROM THE SILHOUETTED GLOBES APPROACHING THE DRIFTING REMAINS OF THE PLANET RIGEL...
POWERFUL SPACE-SCOOPS HUM INTO MAGNETIC ACTION...

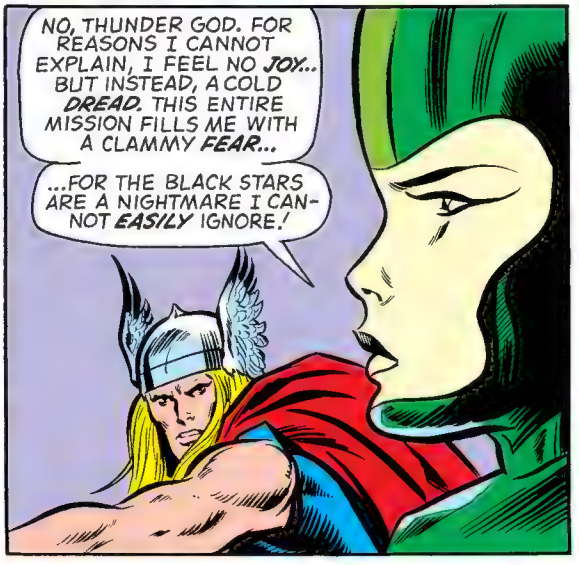

TRACTOR FIELDS SPRING UP, VIBRATION PATTERNS ERECT A POTENT WAVEFRONT OF NEGATIVE ENERGY...AND SLOWLY AT FIRST, THEN WITH INCREASING SPEED, THE BITS OF PLANETARY DEBRIS WHICH WERE ONCE THE PROUD TOWERS OF A MIGHTY RACE--

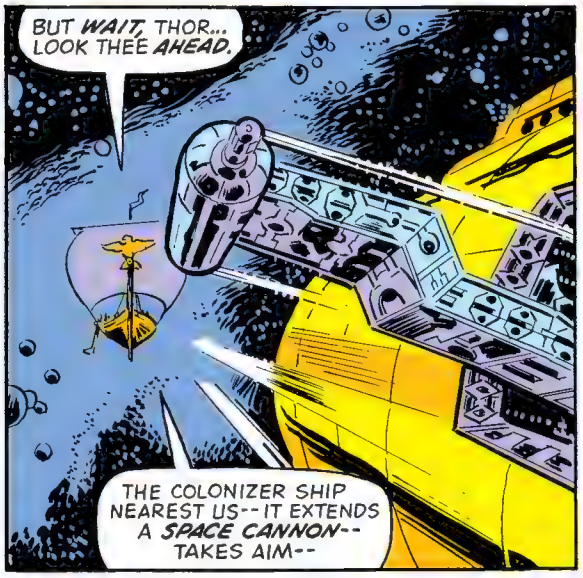
--ARE DRAWN INTO THE MAW OF GIGANTIC WASTE DISPOSAL UNITS--
--WHERE THEY WILL BE BROKEN DOWN INTO PURE ENERGY--
--AND USED TO POWER THE MACHINES OF AN INCREDIBLY SUPERIOR RACE!


MEANWHILE (IF THE TERM HAS ANY POINT IN THIS RELATIVISTIC COSMOS)...
ART THOU SURE OF THEIR PATH, JUKKA?
CERTAIN, THOR. I SAW THEIR NAVIGATION CHARTS.

THEN PERHAPS WE HAVE GONE ASTRAY, FOR I SEE NO SIGN-- BY THE STARS!
AHEAD OF US! 'TIS THE COLONIZER FLEET-- THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT!

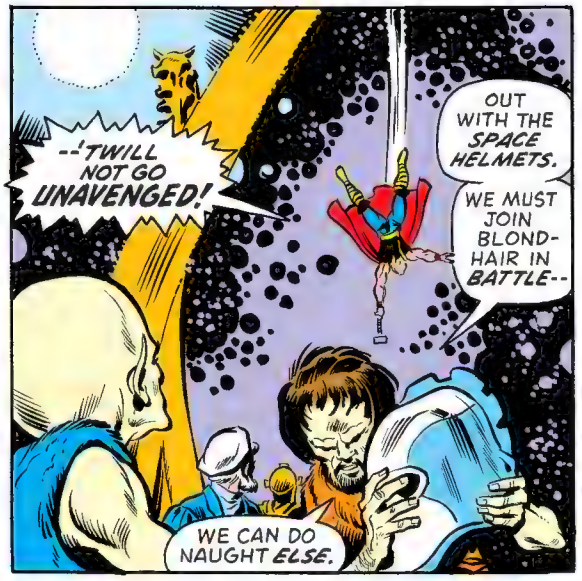

O, THAT THESE PROTON SAILS CAUGHT MORE STELLAR LIGHT-- THAT OUR SHIP MIGHT MORE QUICKLY OVERTAKE YON SPEEDING FLEET.
WHAT SAYEST THOU, TANA NILE?
ARE THOU EAGER TO MEET THY FRIENDS ONCE MORE?

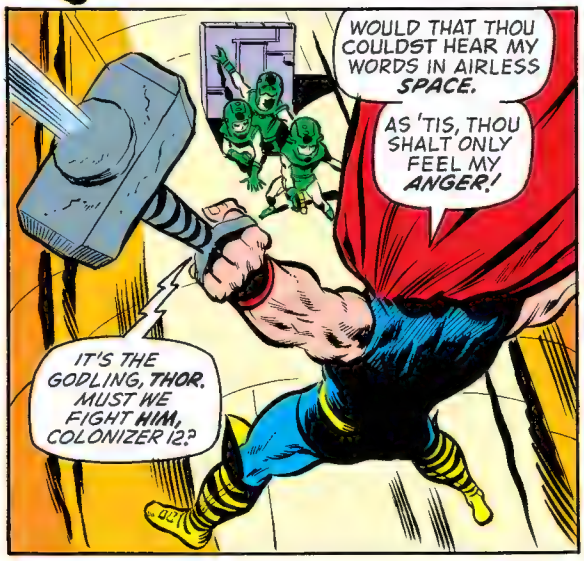

NO, THUNDER GOD. FOR REASONS I CANNOT EXPLAIN, I FEEL NO JOY... BUT INSTEAD, A COLD DREAD. THIS ENTIRE MISSION FILLS ME WITH A CLAMMY FEAR...
...FOR THE BLACK STARS ARE A NIGHTMARE I CANNOT EASILY IGNORE!

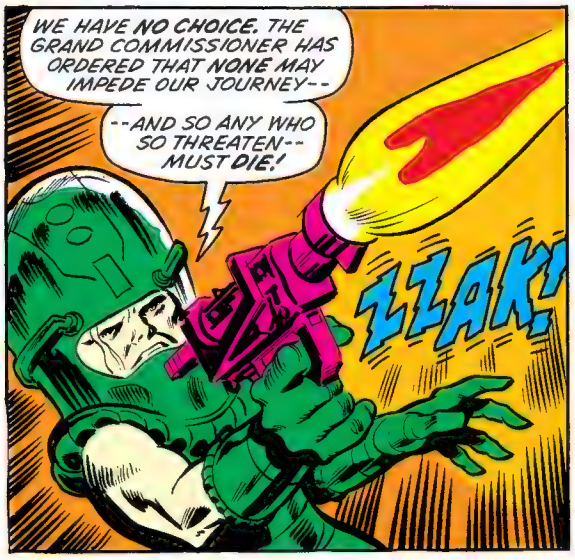

BUT WAIT, THOR... LOOK THEE AHEAD.
THE COLONIZER SHIP NEAREST US--IT EXTENDS A SPACE CANNON-- TAKES AIM--

--AND FIRES!
SPOOM!

GET THEE BACK... ALL OF THEE!
'TIS NOT CLEAR WHAT MEANS THIS UNTOWARD ATTACK--
--BUT THIS I DO SWEAR--

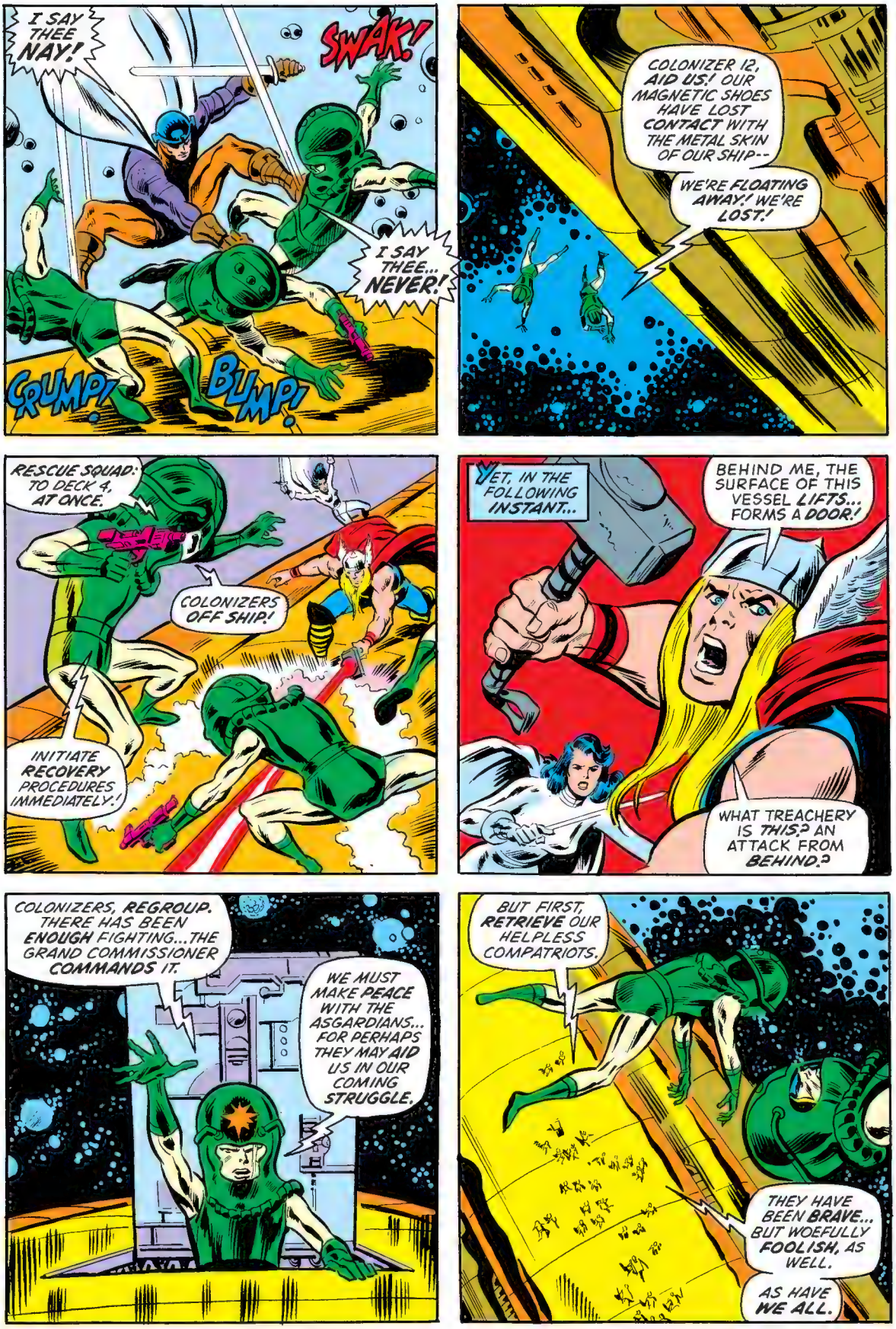

--'TWILL NOT GO UNAVENGED!
OUT WITH THE SPACE HELMETS.
WE MUST JOIN BLOND-HAIR IN BATTLE--
WE CAN DO NAUGHT ELSE.

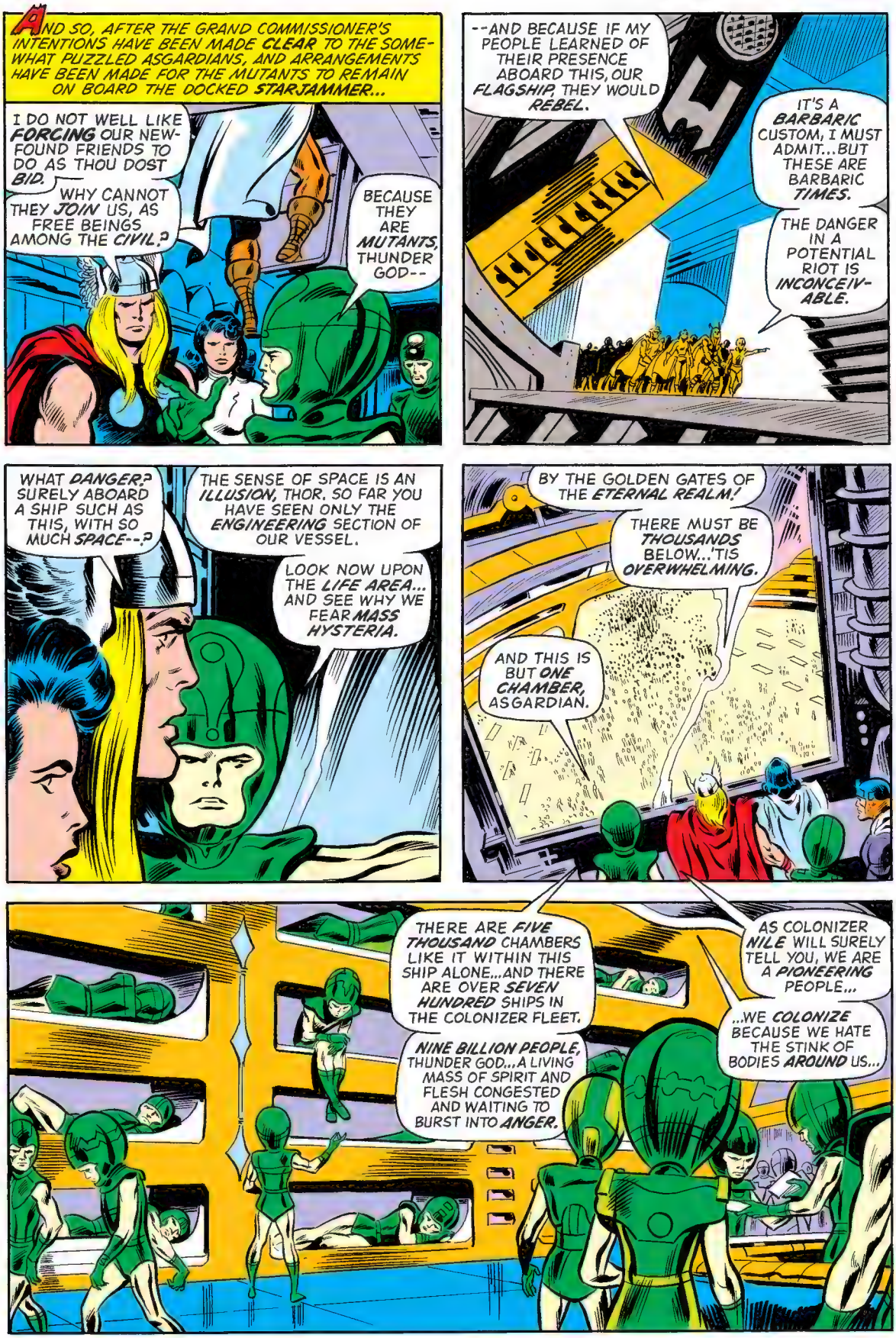

WOULD THAT THOU COULDST HEAR MY WORDS IN AIRLESS SPACE.
AS 'TIS, THOU SHALT ONLY FEEL MY ANGER!
IT'S THE GODLING, THOR. MUST WE FIGHT HIM, COLONIZER 12?

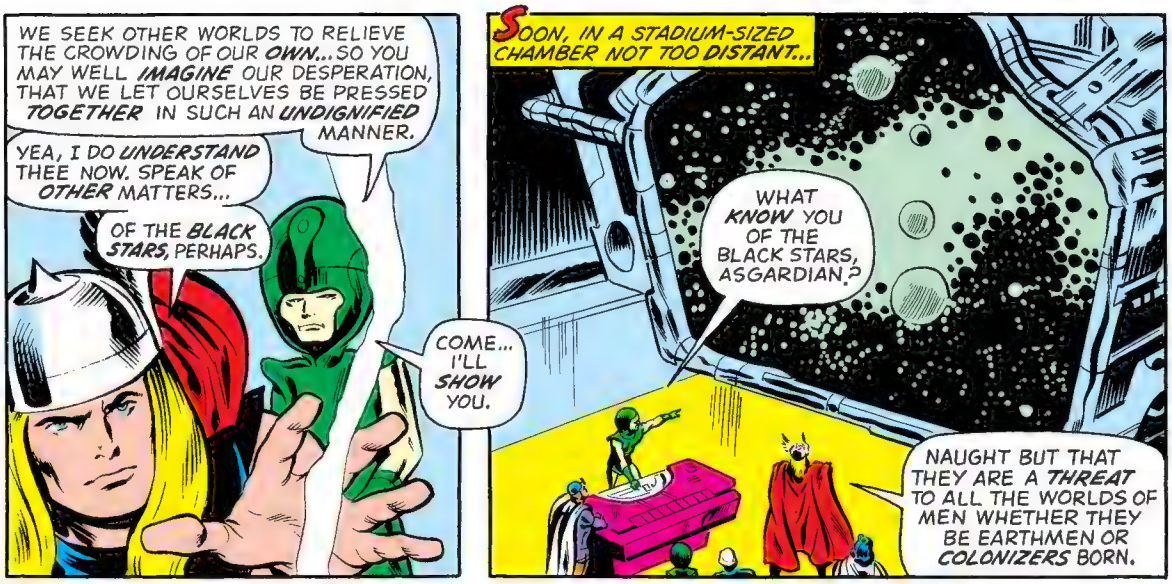

WE HAVE NO CHOICE. THE GRAND COMMISSIONER HAS ORDERED THAT NONE MAY IMPEDE OUR JOURNEY--
--AND SO ANY WHO SO THREATEN-- MUST DIE!
ZZAK!

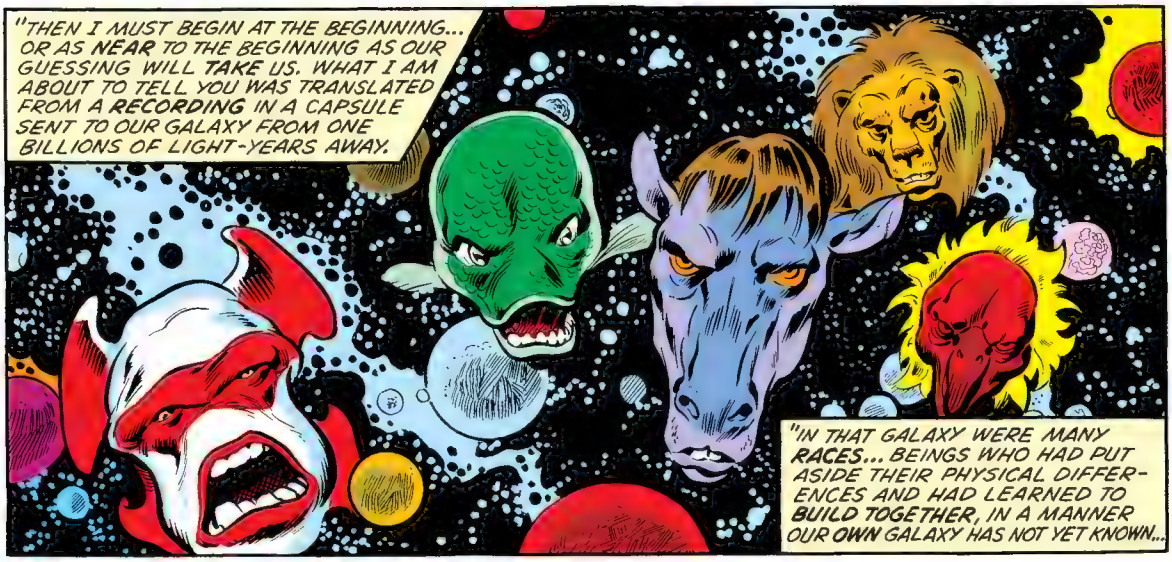
I KNOW NOT WHAT THOU DOST SAY WITHIN THY CRYSTAL HELMETS, BUT THIS I SAY TO THEE--
FRIK!
FRAK!
--NOT ALL THY MIGHT WILL PREVAIL-- 'GAINST THE WONDER OF MYSTIC MJOLNIR!
ZAK!

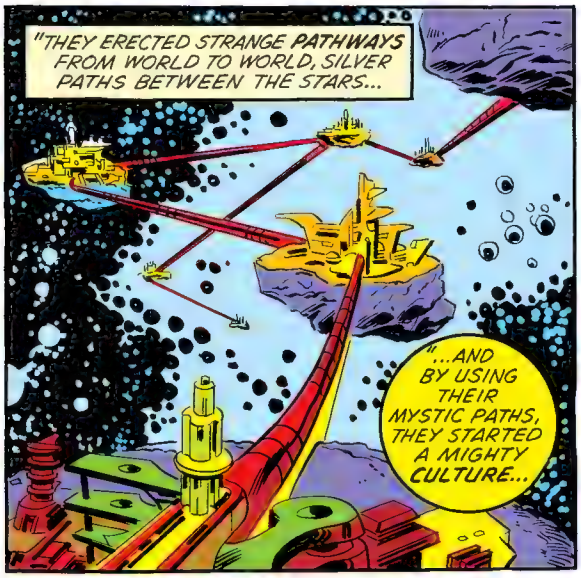
WILL WE STAND AND WATCH AS OUR LORD BATTLES DEMONS?
SO THOU MAY DO... BUT AS FOR BALDER, CALLED THE BRAVE...

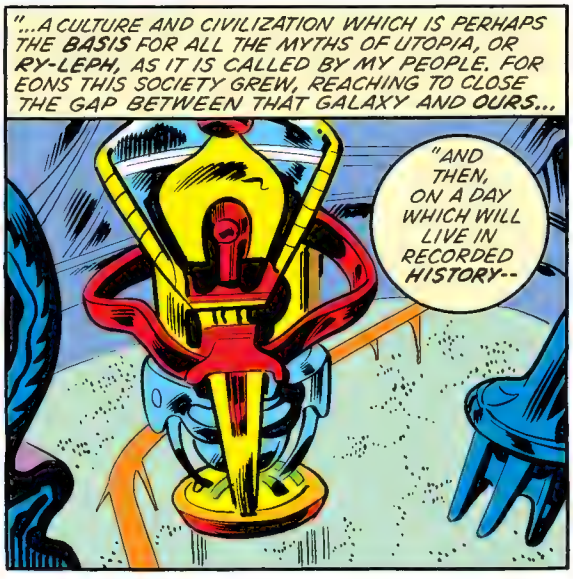

I SAY THEE NAY!
SWAK!
I SAY THEE... NEVER!
CRUMP!
BLUMP!
COLONIZER 12, AID US! OUR MAGNETIC SHOES HAVE LOST CONTACT WITH THE METAL SKIN OF OUR SHIP--
WE'RE FLOATING AWAY! WE'RE LOST!
RESCUE SQUAD: TO DECK 4, AT ONCE.
COLONIZERS OFF SHIP!
INITIATE RECOVERY PROCEDURES IMMEDIATELY!
YET, IN THE FOLLOWING INSTANT...
BEHIND ME, THE SURFACE OF THIS VESSEL LIFTS... FORMS A DOOR!
WHAT TREACHERY IS THIS? AN ATTACK FROM BEHIND?
COLONIZERS, REGROUP. THERE HAS BEEN ENOUGH FIGHTING...THE GRAND COMMISSIONER COMMANDS IT.
WE MUST MAKE PEACE WITH THE ASGARDIANS... FOR PERHAPS THEY MAY AID US IN OUR COMING STRUGGLE.
BUT FIRST, RETRIEVE OUR HELPLESS COMPATRIOTS.
THEY HAVE BEEN BRAVE... BUT WOEFULLY FOOLISH, AS WELL.
AS HAVE WE ALL.

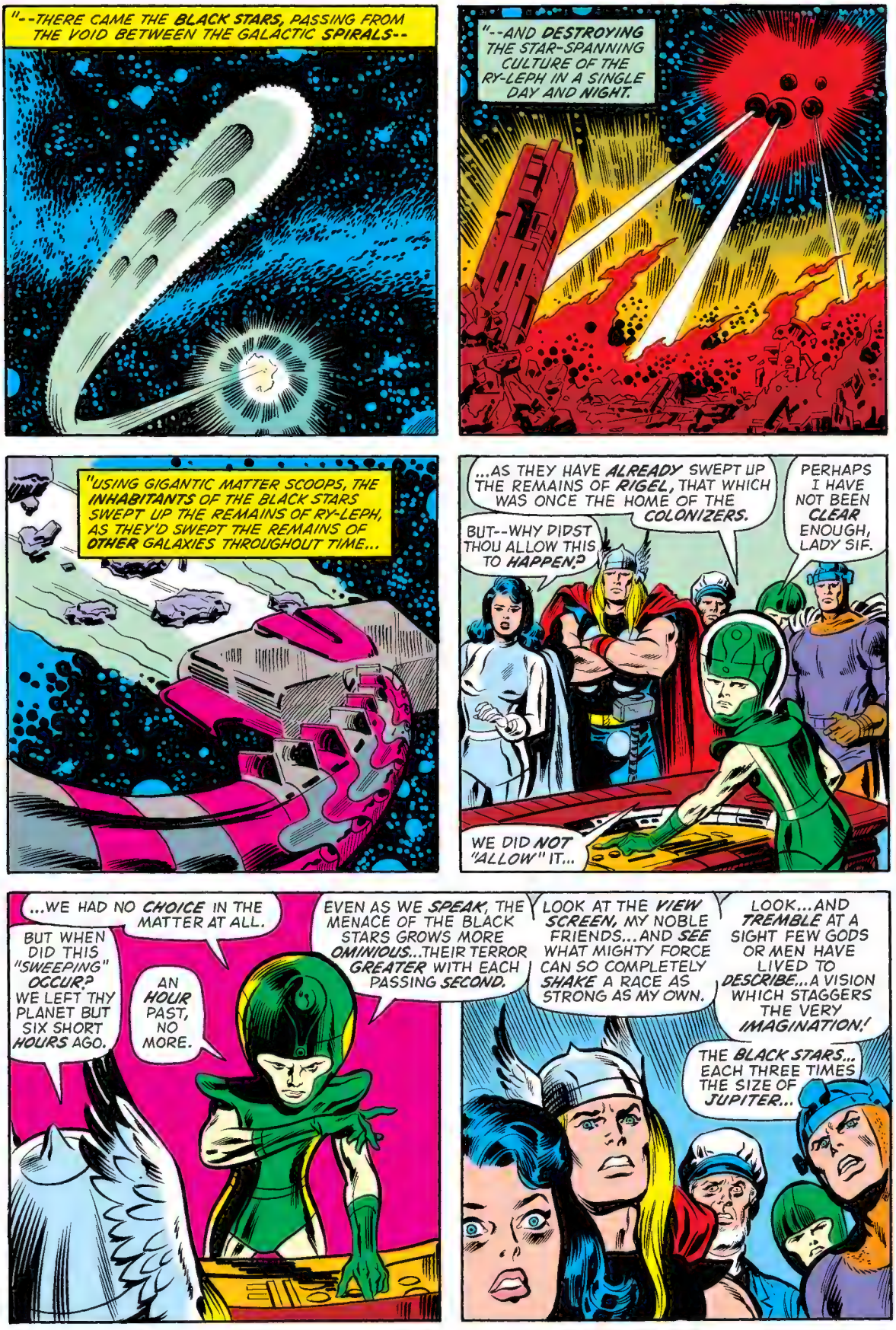

AND SO, AFTER THE GRAND COMMISSIONER'S INTENTIONS HAVE BEEN MADE CLEAR TO THE SOMEWHAT PUZZLED ASGARDIANS, AND ARRANGEMENTS HAVE BEEN MADE FOR THE MUTANTS TO REMAIN ON BOARD THE DOCKED STARJAMMER...
I DO NOT WELL LIKE FORCING OUR NEWFOUND FRIENDS TO DO AS THOU DOST BID.
WHY CANNOT THEY JOIN US, AS FREE BEINGS AMONG THE CIVIL?
BECAUSE THEY ARE MUTANTS, THUNDER GOD--
--AND BECAUSE IF MY PEOPLE LEARNED OF THEIR PRESENCE ABOARD THIS, OUR FLAGSHIP, THEY WOULD REBEL.
IT'S A BARBARIC CUSTOM, I MUST ADMIT...BUT THESE ARE BARBARIC TIMES.
THE DANGER IN A POTENTIAL RIOT IS INCONCEIVABLE.
WHAT DANGER? SURELY ABOARD A SHIP SUCH AS THIS, WITH SO MUCH SPACE--?
THE SENSE OF SPACE IS AN ILLUSION, THOR. SO FAR YOU HAVE SEEN ONLY THE ENGINEERING SECTION OF OUR VESSEL.
LOOK NOW UPON THE LIFE AREA... AND SEE WHY WE FEAR MASS HYSTERIA.
BY THE GOLDEN GATES OF THE ETERNAL REALM!
THERE MUST BE THOUSANDS BELOW...'TIS OVERWHELMING.
AND THIS IS BUT ONE CHAMBER, ASGARDIAN.
THERE ARE FIVE THOUSAND CHAMBERS LIKE IT WITHIN THIS SHIP ALONE...AND THERE ARE OVER SEVEN HUNDRED SHIPS IN THE COLONIZER FLEET.
NINE BILLION PEOPLE, THUNDER GOD...A LIVING MASS OF SPIRIT AND FLESH CONGESTED AND WAITING TO BURST INTO ANGER.
AS COLONIZER NILE WILL SURELY TELL YOU, WE ARE A PIONEERING PEOPLE...
...WE COLONIZE BECAUSE WE HATE THE STINK OF BODIES AROUND US...

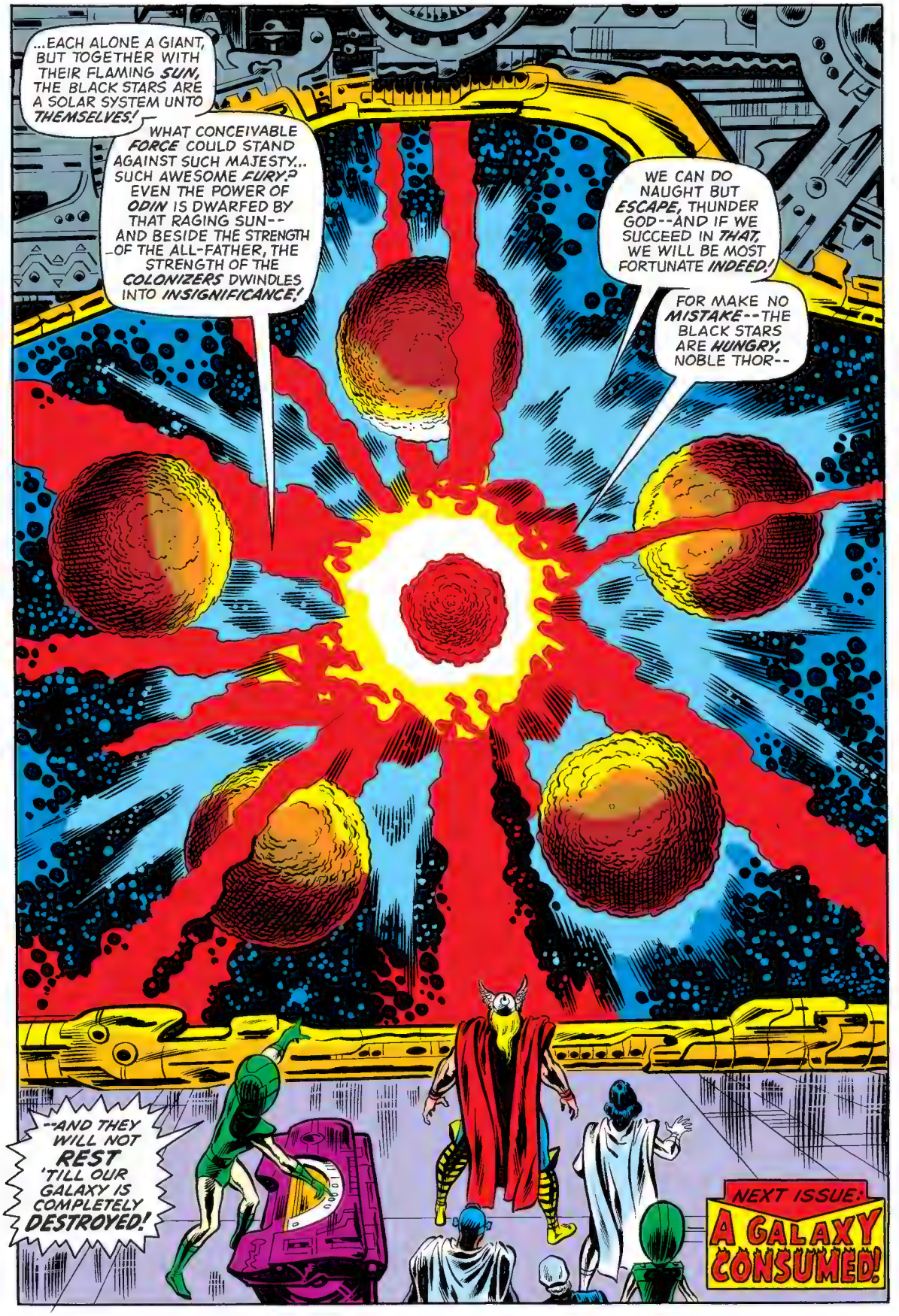

WE SEEK OTHER WORLDS TO RELIEVE THE CROWDING OF OUR OWN... SO YOU MAY WELL IMAGINE OUR DESPERATION, THAT WE LET OURSELVES BE PRESSED TOGETHER IN SUCH AN UNDIGNIFIED MANNER.
YEA, I DO UNDERSTAND THEE NOW. SPEAK OF OTHER MATTERS...
OF THE BLACK STARS, PERHAPS.
COME... I'LL SHOW YOU.
SOON, IN A STADIUM-SIZED CHAMBER NOT TOO DISTANT...
WHAT KNOW YOU OF THE BLACK STARS, ASGARDIAN?
NAUGHT BUT THAT THEY ARE A THREAT TO ALL THE WORLDS OF MEN WHETHER THEY BE EARTHMEN OR COLONIZERS BORN.


"THEN I MUST BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING... OR AS NEAR TO THE BEGINNING AS OUR GUESSING WILL TAKE US. WHAT I AM ABOUT TO TELL YOU WAS TRANSLATED FROM A RECORDING IN A CAPSULE SENT TO OUR GALAXY FROM ONE BILLIONS OF LIGHT-YEARS AWAY.
"IN THAT GALAXY WERE MANY RACES... BEINGS WHO HAD PUT ASIDE THEIR PHYSICAL DIFFERENCES AND HAD LEARNED TO BUILD TOGETHER, IN A MANNER OUR OWN GALAXY HAS NOT YET KNOWN...


"THEY ERECTED STRANGE PATHWAYS FROM WORLD TO WORLD, SILVER PATHS BETWEEN THE STARS...
"...AND BY USING THEIR MYSTIC PATHS, THEY STARTED A MIGHTY CULTURE...


"...A CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION WHICH IS PERHAPS THE BASIS FOR ALL THE MYTHS OF UTOPIA, OR RY-LEPH, AS IT IS CALLED BY MY PEOPLE. FOR EONS THIS SOCIETY GREW, REACHING TO CLOSE THE GAP BETWEEN THAT GALAXY AND OURS...
"AND THEN, ON A DAY WHICH WILL LIVE IN RECORDED HISTORY--


"--THERE CAME THE BLACK STARS, PASSING FROM THE VOID BETWEEN THE GALACTIC SPIRALS--
"--AND DESTROYING THE STAR-SPANNING CULTURE OF THE RY-LEPH IN A SINGLE DAY AND NIGHT.
"USING GIGANTIC MATTER SCOOPS, THE INHABITANTS OF THE BLACK STARS SWEPT UP THE REMAINS OF RY-LEPH, AS THEY'D SWEPT THE REMAINS OF OTHER GALAXIES THROUGHOUT TIME...
...AS THEY HAVE ALREADY SWEPT UP THE REMAINS OF RIGEL, THAT WHICH WAS ONCE THE HOME OF THE COLONIZERS.
BUT--WHY DIDST THOU ALLOW THIS TO HAPPEN?
PERHAPS I HAVE NOT BEEN CLEAR ENOUGH, LADY SIF.
WE DID NOT "ALLOW" IT...
...WE HAD NO CHOICE IN THE MATTER AT ALL.
BUT WHEN DID THIS "SWEEPING" OCCUR? WE LEFT THY PLANET BUT SIX SHORT HOURS AGO.
AN HOUR PAST, NO MORE.
EVEN AS WE SPEAK, THE MENACE OF THE BLACK STARS GROWS MORE OMINIOUS...THEIR TERROR GREATER WITH EACH PASSING SECOND.
LOOK AT THE VIEW SCREEN, MY NOBLE FRIENDS...AND SEE WHAT MIGHTY FORCE CAN SO COMPLETELY SHAKE A RACE AS STRONG AS MY OWN.
LOOK...AND TREMBLE AT A SIGHT FEW GODS OR MEN HAVE LIVED TO DESCRIBE...A VISION WHICH STAGGERS THE VERY IMAGINATION!
THE BLACK STARS... EACH THREE TIMES THE SIZE OF JUPITER...


...EACH ALONE A GIANT, BUT TOGETHER WITH THEIR FLAMING SUN, THE BLACK STARS ARE A SOLAR SYSTEM UNTO THEMSELVES!
WHAT CONCEIVABLE FORCE COULD STAND AGAINST SUCH MAJESTY.. SUCH AWESOME FURY? EVEN THE POWER OF ODIN IS DWARFED BY THAT RAGING SUN-- AND BESIDE THE STRENGTH OF THE ALL-FATHER, THE STRENGTH OF THE COLONIZERS DWINDLES INTO INSIGNIFICANCE!
WE CAN DO NAUGHT BUT ESCAPE, THUNDER GOD--AND IF WE SUCCEED IN THAT, WE WILL BE MOST FORTUNATE INDEED!
FOR MAKE NO MISTAKE--THE BLACK STARS ARE HUNGRY, NOBLE THOR--
--AND THEY WILL NOT REST 'TILL OUR GALAXY IS COMPLETELY DESTROYED!
NEXT ISSUE:
A GALAXY CONSUMED!

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JAN
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THE MIGHTY
THOR®
THE POWER OF THE PROTECTOR!
NO MATTER THY STRENGTH-- THOR IS THE MIGHTIER!
"A GALAXY CONSUMED!"
SPECIAL BULLETIN FOR SHOCK ENDING FANS:
YOU'LL BE STAGGERED TO LEARN THE PROTECTOR'S STARTLING SECRET -- REVEALED ONLY ON THIS ISSUE'S FINAL PAGE!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE MIGHTY THOR!™

GERRY CONWAY SCRIPTER // JOHN BUSCEMA ARTIST // M. ESPOSITO INKER // L.P. GREGORY GLYNIS WEIN LETTERER COLORIST // ROY THOMAS EDITOR // ODIN ALL-FATHER

A GALAXY CONSUMED!

BY BIFROST'S GOLDEN SPAN! 'TIS UTTER MADNESS-- A SIGHT BE-YOND BELIEF!
IT CAN'T BE TRUE, LAD...YET IT IS!!
AS A CHILD, I WAS TOLD ABOUT IT... BUT I THOUGHT IT ONLY A LEGEND, A STORY TO FRIGHTEN CHILDREN!!
'TIS NO LEGEND, TANA NILE. 'TIS ALL A MOST TERRIBLE FACT!
THOR... WHAT SHALL WE DO? WHAT CAN WE DO?
THE UNIVERSE IS DOOMED!

UNFORTUNATELY FOR US ALL, THE LADY SIF IS QUITE *CORRECT!*

WE ARE *DOOMED*-- BY A MENACE *NO* MAN OR GOD CAN *DEFEAT!*

ALREADY, THE HOME PLANET OF MY PEOPLE IS *DESTROYED*-- CONSUMED BY THE THREAT YOU SEE *BEFORE* YOU--

--AND THOUGH WE COLONIZERS *FLEE*, OUR FLIGHT IS PURE *FUTILITY*--

FOR NO ONE CAN ESCAPE-- ***THE BLACK STARS!***

THOU DOST SPEAK THE *TRUTH*, GRAND COMMISSIONER! OUR LORD *ODIN* PREDICTED THEIR COMING--AND SENT WE FIVE TO *FACE* YON MASSIVE PLANETS, AND PERHAPS-- TO TURN THEM *AWAY* FROM THIS, OUR GALACTIC *KINGDOM.**

BUT IT APPEARS THAT OUR MISSION IS IN VAIN!

WHAT HOPE HAVE *WE*, GODS THOUGH WE MAY BE, 'GAINST SUCH COLOSSAL MAJESTY AS *THIS?*

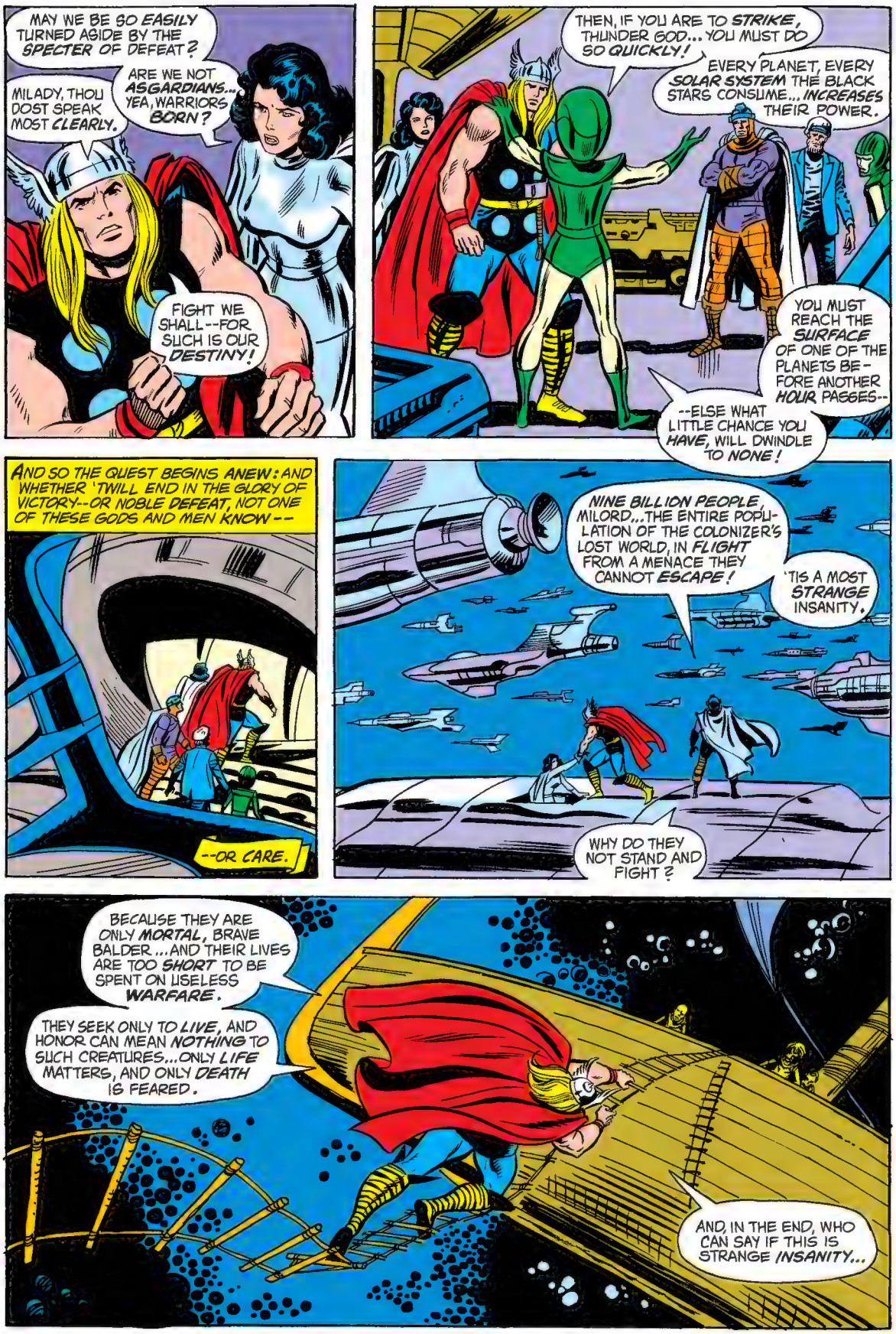
'TWOULD BE *MADNESS* TO ATTACK FIVE PLANETS EACH THREE TIMES THE SIZE OF MIGHTY *JUPITER*--

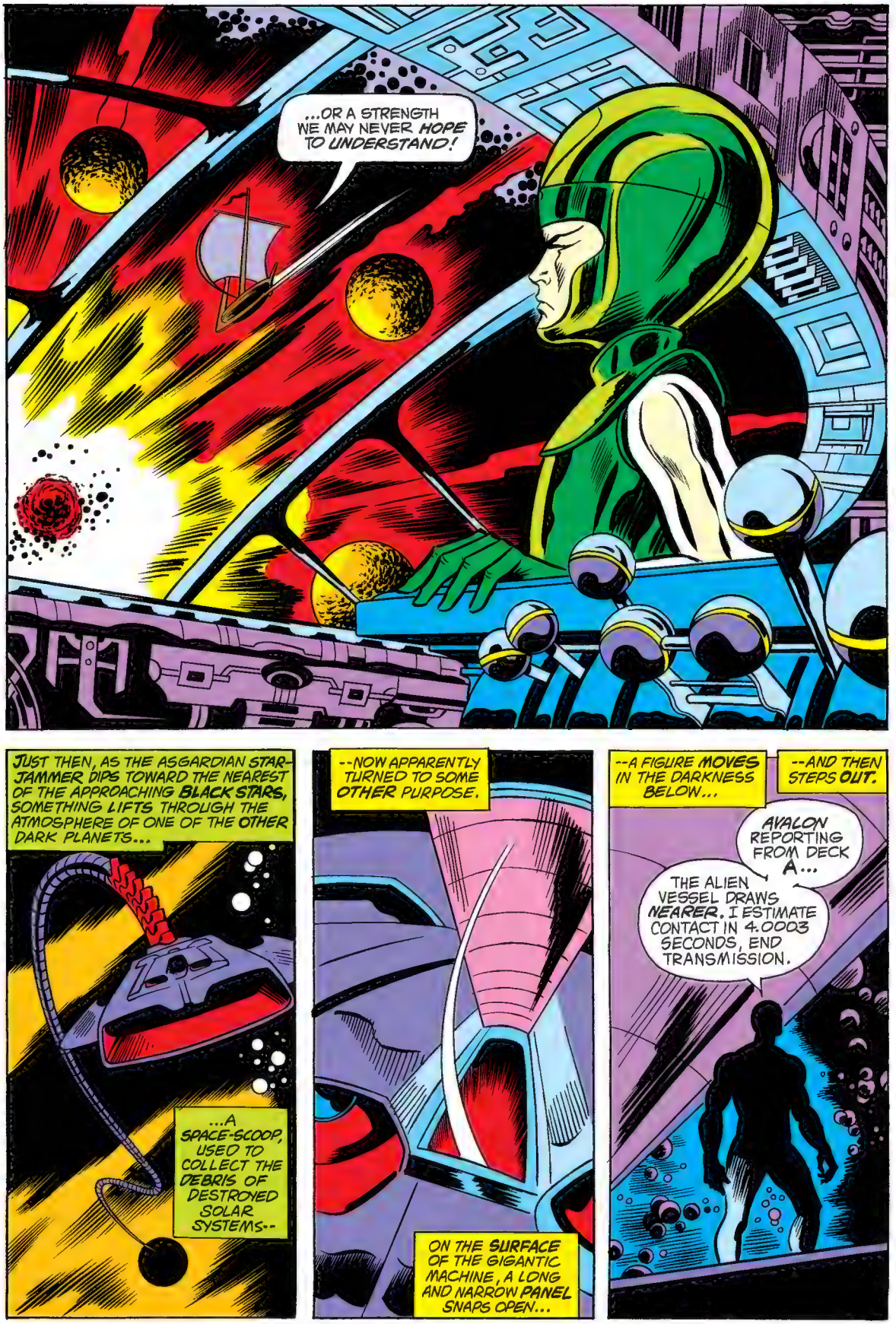
--MORE MADNESS STILL TO RISE UP AGAINST YON GIANT *SUN!*

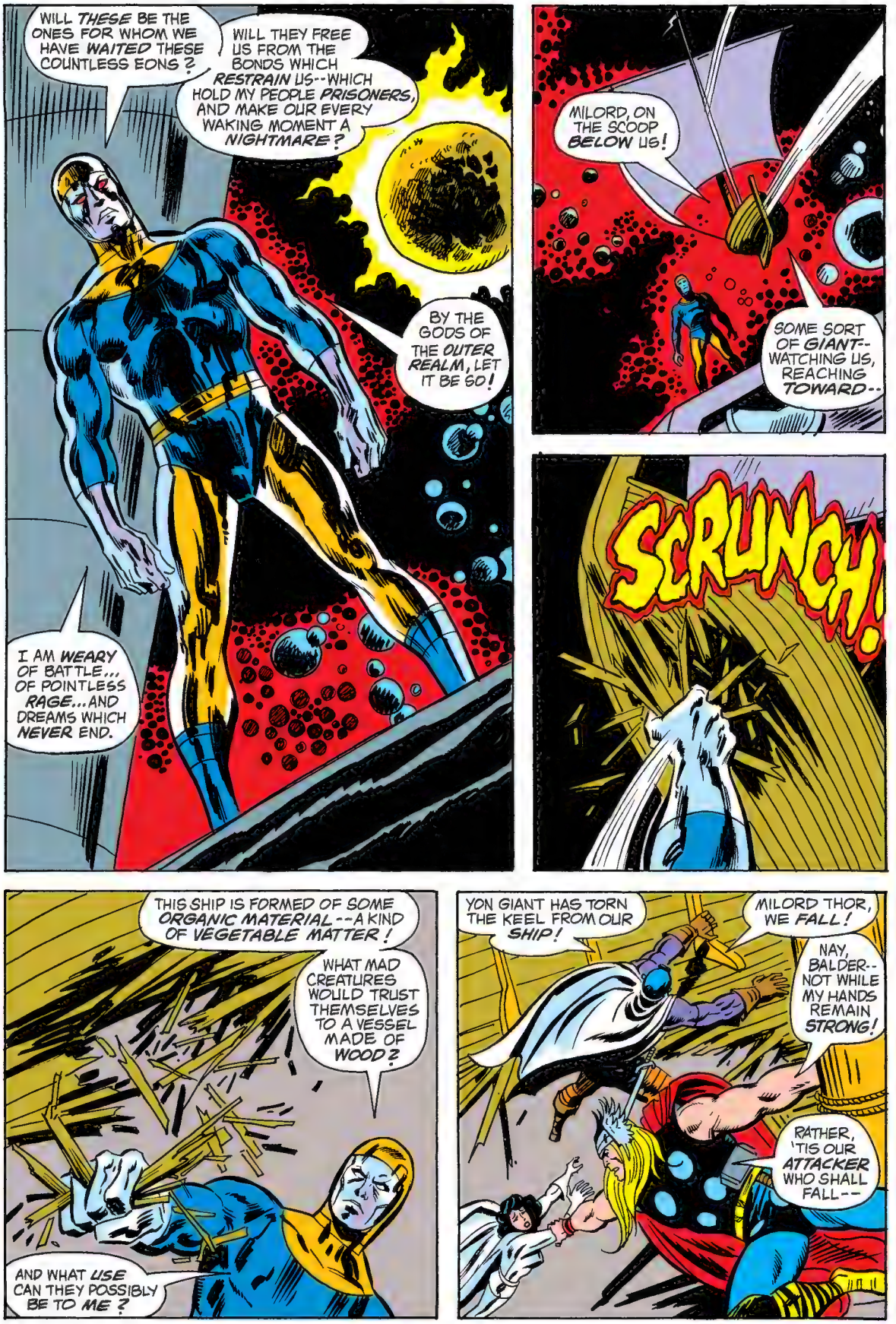
VERILY, WE ARE *DEFEATED*... 'ERE WE HAVE EVEN *BEGUN!*

MILORD... I SAY THEE ***NAY!***

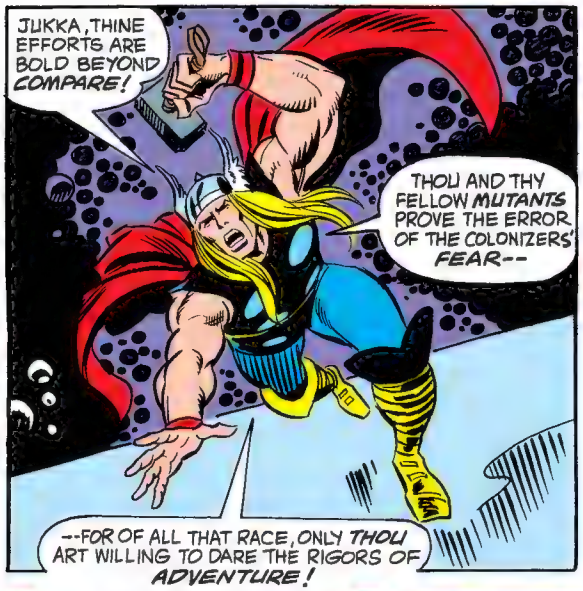
**LAST ISSUE.*
-- ROY.

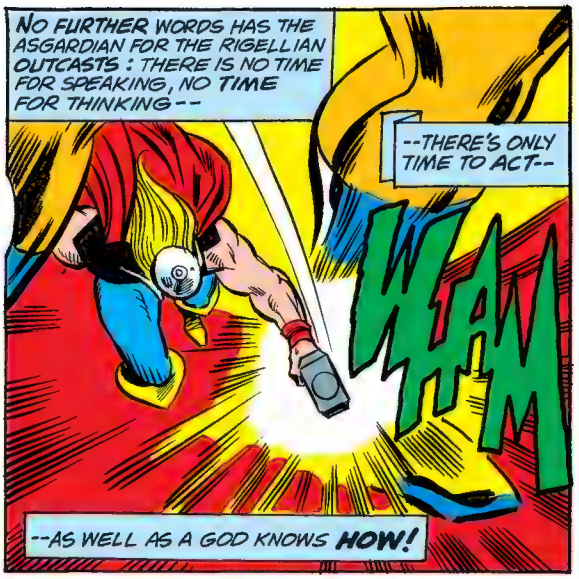

MAY WE BE SO EASILY TURNED ASIDE BY THE SPECTER OF DEFEAT?
ARE WE NOT ASGARDIANS... YEA, WARRIORS BORN?
MILADY, THOU DOST SPEAK MOST CLEARLY.
FIGHT WE SHALL--FOR SUCH IS OUR DESTINY!
THEN, IF YOU ARE TO STRIKE, THUNDER GOD... YOU MUST DO SO QUICKLY!
EVERY PLANET, EVERY SOLAR SYSTEM THE BLACK STARS CONSUME... INCREASES THEIR POWER.
YOU MUST REACH THE SURFACE OF ONE OF THE PLANETS BE-FORE ANOTHER HOUR PASSES--
--ELSE WHAT LITTLE CHANCE YOU HAVE, WILL DWINDLE TO NONE!
AND SO THE QUEST BEGINS ANEW: AND WHETHER 'TWILL END IN THE GLORY OF VICTORY--OR NOBLE DEFEAT, NOT ONE OF THESE GODS AND MEN KNOW--
--OR CARE.
NINE BILLION PEOPLE, MILORD...THE ENTIRE POPU-LATION OF THE COLONIZER'S LOST WORLD, IN FLIGHT FROM A MENACE THEY CANNOT ESCAPE!
'TIS A MOST STRANGE INSANITY.
WHY DO THEY NOT STAND AND FIGHT?
BECAUSE THEY ARE ONLY MORTAL, BRAVE BALDER...AND THEIR LIVES ARE TOO SHORT TO BE SPENT ON USELESS WARFARE.
THEY SEEK ONLY TO LIVE, AND HONOR CAN MEAN NOTHING TO SUCH CREATURES...ONLY LIFE MATTERS, AND ONLY DEATH IS FEARED.
AND, IN THE END, WHO CAN SAY IF THIS IS STRANGE INSANITY...


...OR A STRENGTH WE MAY NEVER HOPE TO UNDERSTAND!
JUST THEN, AS THE ASGARDIAN STAR-JAMMER DIPS TOWARD THE NEAREST OF THE APPROACHING BLACK STARS, SOMETHING LIFTS THROUGH THE ATMOSPHERE OF ONE OF THE OTHER DARK PLANETS...
...A SPACE-SCOOP, USED TO COLLECT THE DEBRIS OF DESTROYED SOLAR SYSTEMS--
--NOW APPARENTLY TURNED TO SOME OTHER PURPOSE.
ON THE SURFACE OF THE GIGANTIC MACHINE, A LONG AND NARROW PANEL SNAPS OPEN...
--A FIGURE MOVES IN THE DARKNESS BELOW...
--AND THEN STEPS OUT.
AVALON REPORTING FROM DECK A...
THE ALIEN VESSEL DRAWS NEARER. I ESTIMATE CONTACT IN 4.0003 SECONDS, END TRANSMISSION.

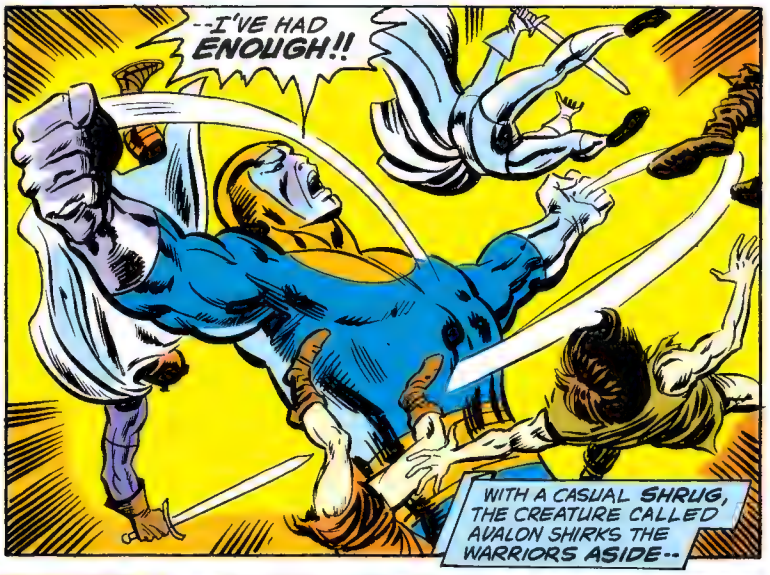

WILL THESE BE THE ONES FOR WHOM WE HAVE WAITED THESE COUNTLESS EONS?
WILL THEY FREE US FROM THE BONDS WHICH RESTRAIN US--WHICH HOLD MY PEOPLE PRISONERS, AND MAKE OUR EVERY WAKING MOMENT A NIGHTMARE?
BY THE GODS OF THE OUTER REALM, LET IT BE SO!
I AM WEARY OF BATTLE... OF POINTLESS RAGE... AND DREAMS WHICH NEVER END.
MILORD, ON THE SCOOP BELOW US!
SOME SORT OF GIANT-- WATCHING US, REACHING TOWARD--
SCRUNCH!
THIS SHIP IS FORMED OF SOME ORGANIC MATERIAL--A KIND OF VEGETABLE MATTER!
WHAT MAD CREATURES WOULD TRUST THEMSELVES TO A VESSEL MADE OF WOOD?
AND WHAT USE CAN THEY POSSIBLY BE TO ME?
YON GIANT HAS TORN THE KEEL FROM OUR SHIP!
MILORD THOR, WE FALL!
NAY, BALDER-- NOT WHILE MY HANDS REMAIN STRONG!
RATHER, 'TIS OUR ATTACKER WHO SHALL FALL--

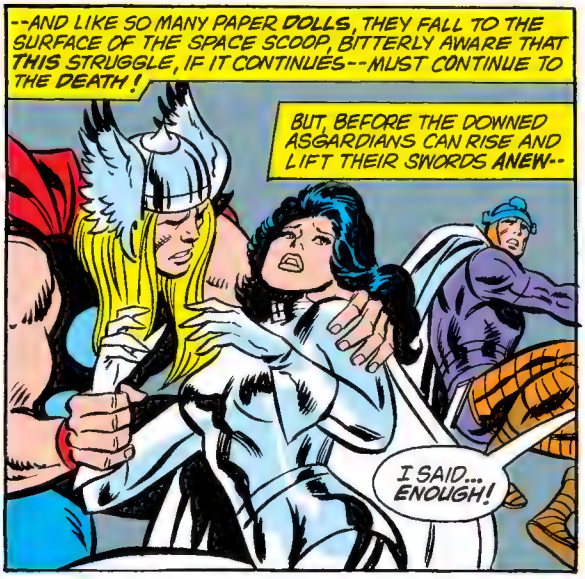
--WHEN STRIKES THE GOD OF THUNDER!
YET, EVEN AS THE SON OF ODIN DROPS TO THE ATTACK, THE CREATURE WHO CALLS HIMSELF AVALON SEEMS TO SOAK UP ENERGY FROM THE SKIN OF THE SPACE SCOOP--
--AND WITH THAT ENERGY-- LASHES OUT!
SWAP!
MILORD IS THROWN BACK-- HE LIES STILL, UNCONSCIOUS 'PON THAT ALIEN CRAFT! LADY SIF, I CANNOT SPEAK FOR THEE--
--BUT I FOR ONE MUST JOIN THE FRAY--
--NOW!
KRANG
BRAVE COMRADE, THOU DO ME AN INJUSTICE. WHERE BE SIF IF NOT BESIDE HER BELOVED THOR?
FOR IN TRUTH-- I BE A NOBLE-WOMAN BORN!
LET THE BATTLE BE FIERCE-- SIF SHALL NE'ER AVOID IT!
YOU SHAME US, WOMAN!
THIS I SWEAR-- WHERE YOU STAND, SO STAND WE ALL!


JUKKA, THINE EFFORTS ARE BOLD BEYOND COMPARE!
THOU AND THY FELLOW MUTANTS PROVE THE ERROR OF THE COLONIZERS' FEAR--
--FOR OF ALL THAT RACE, ONLY THOU ART WILLING TO DARE THE RIGORS OF ADVENTURE!


NO FURTHER WORDS HAS THE ASGARDIAN FOR THE RIGELLIAN OUTCASTS: THERE IS NO TIME FOR SPEAKING, NO TIME FOR THINKING--
--THERE'S ONLY TIME TO ACT--
WHAM
--AS WELL AS A GOD KNOWS HOW!

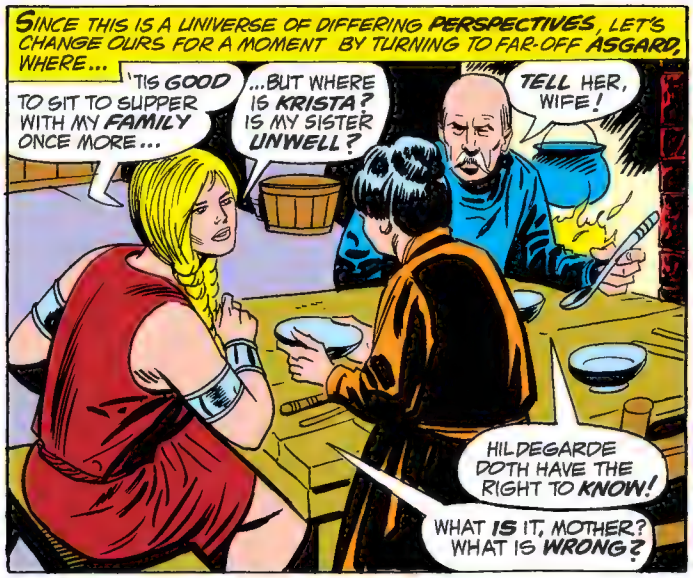
GODS! NEVER HAVE I MET SUCH FURY! NEVER HAVE I FOUGHT SO DETERMINED A FOE!
LET THERE BE AN END TO FIGHTING--

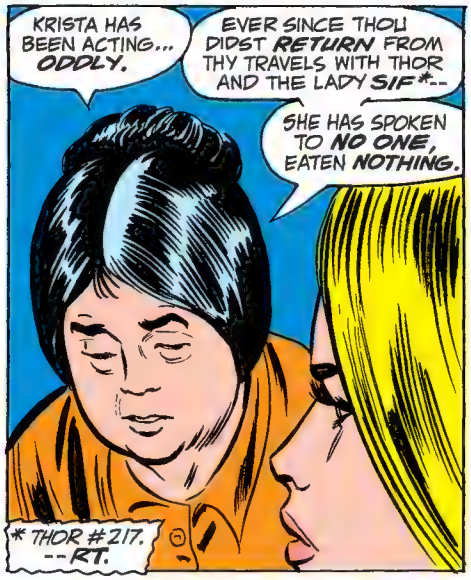

--I'VE HAD ENOUGH!!
WITH A CASUAL SHRUG, THE CREATURE CALLED AVALON SHIRKS THE WARRIORS ASIDE--

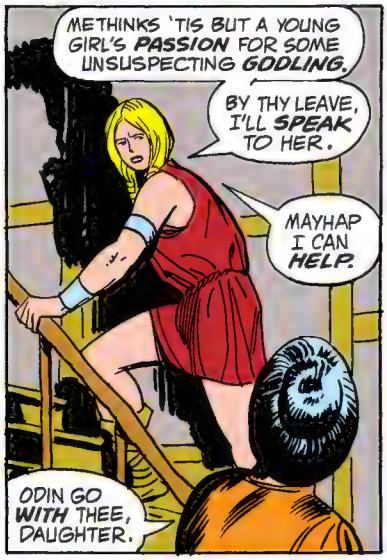

--AND LIKE SO MANY PAPER DOLLS, THEY FALL TO THE SURFACE OF THE SPACE SCOOP, BITTERLY AWARE THAT THIS STRUGGLE, IF IT CONTINUES--MUST CONTINUE TO THE DEATH!
BUT, BEFORE THE DOWNED ASGARDIANS CAN RISE AND LIFT THEIR SWORDS ANEW--
I SAID... ENOUGH!

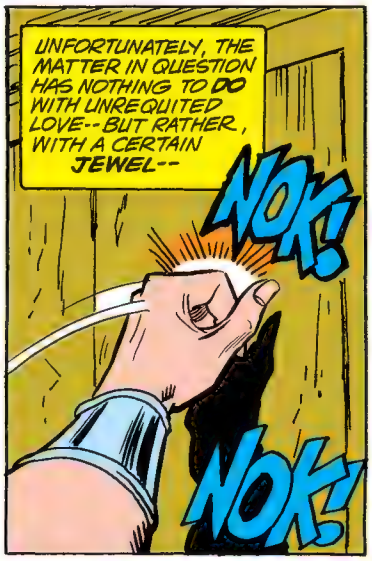
I LEARNED WHAT I'VE BEEN SENT TO LEARN! THERE CAN BE NO FURTHER NEED FOR CONFLICT!
I AM AVALON... KNIGHT OF THE INNER REALM AND I WOULD LIKE TO WELCOME YOU... AS FRIENDS!

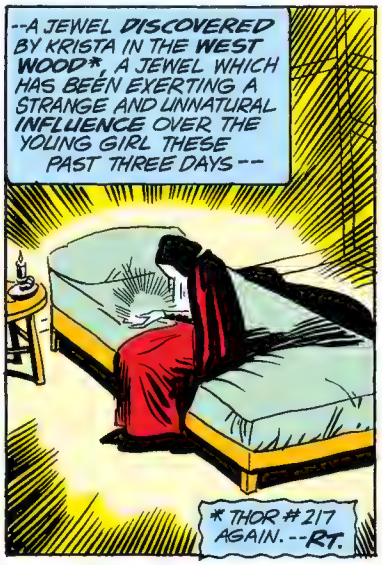
THOU DOST DISPLAY THY FRIENDSHIP IN A MANNER MOST ODD, AVALON!
IT WAS NECESSARY TO TEST YOU... ALL OF YOU. BELIEVE THIS, ASGARDIAN. AVALON CANNOT LIE.
PERHAPS SO. TELL US THEN THE PURPOSE OF THIS-- "TESTING."
FOR REASONS WHICH WILL SOON BECOME CLEAR, I HAD TO LEARN THE EXTENT OF YOUR POWER--AND EVEN MORE IMPORTANT, THE DEPTH OF YOUR COURAGE!
WILT THOU NEVER TELL US THE MEANING OF THIS GAME?
IN BOTH AREAS YOU'VE SURPASSED MY GREATEST EXPECTATIONS!
I'LL DO BETTER THAN TELL YOU, THUNDER GOD...
...I'LL SHOW YOU, IF YOU'RE WILLING!
DON'T TRUST HIM, THOR.
HE SEEMS TOO... REASONABLE.
PERHAPS IN THIS MADNESS WE NEED REASON, JUKKA...
...EVEN IF 'TIS A REASON WE DO NOT FULLY UNDERSTAND.
LEAD US, AVALON. FOR THE NONCE-- WE ARE THINE!
THAT'S A DECISION YOU WON'T SOON REGRET, MY FRIEND.
MY PEOPLE AND I NEED YOUR HELP... AND, AS I'M SURE YOU'LL DISCOVER...
...YOU MOST CERTAINLY NEED OURS!


SINCE THIS IS A UNIVERSE OF DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES, LET'S CHANGE OURS FOR A MOMENT BY TURNING TO FAR-OFF ASGARD, WHERE...
'TIS GOOD TO SIT TO SUPPER WITH MY FAMILY ONCE MORE...
...BUT WHERE IS KRISTA? IS MY SISTER UNWELL?
TELL HER, WIFE!
HILDEGARDE DOTH HAVE THE RIGHT TO KNOW!
WHAT IS IT, MOTHER? WHAT IS WRONG?


KRISTA HAS BEEN ACTING... ODDLY.
EVER SINCE THOU DIDST RETURN FROM THY TRAVELS WITH THOR AND THE LADY SIF*--
SHE HAS SPOKEN TO NO ONE, EATEN NOTHING.
* THOR #217. --RT.


METHINKS 'TIS BUT A YOUNG GIRL'S PASSION FOR SOME UNSUSPECTING GODLING.
BY THY LEAVE, I'LL SPEAK TO HER.
MAYHAP I CAN HELP.
ODIN GO WITH THEE, DAUGHTER.

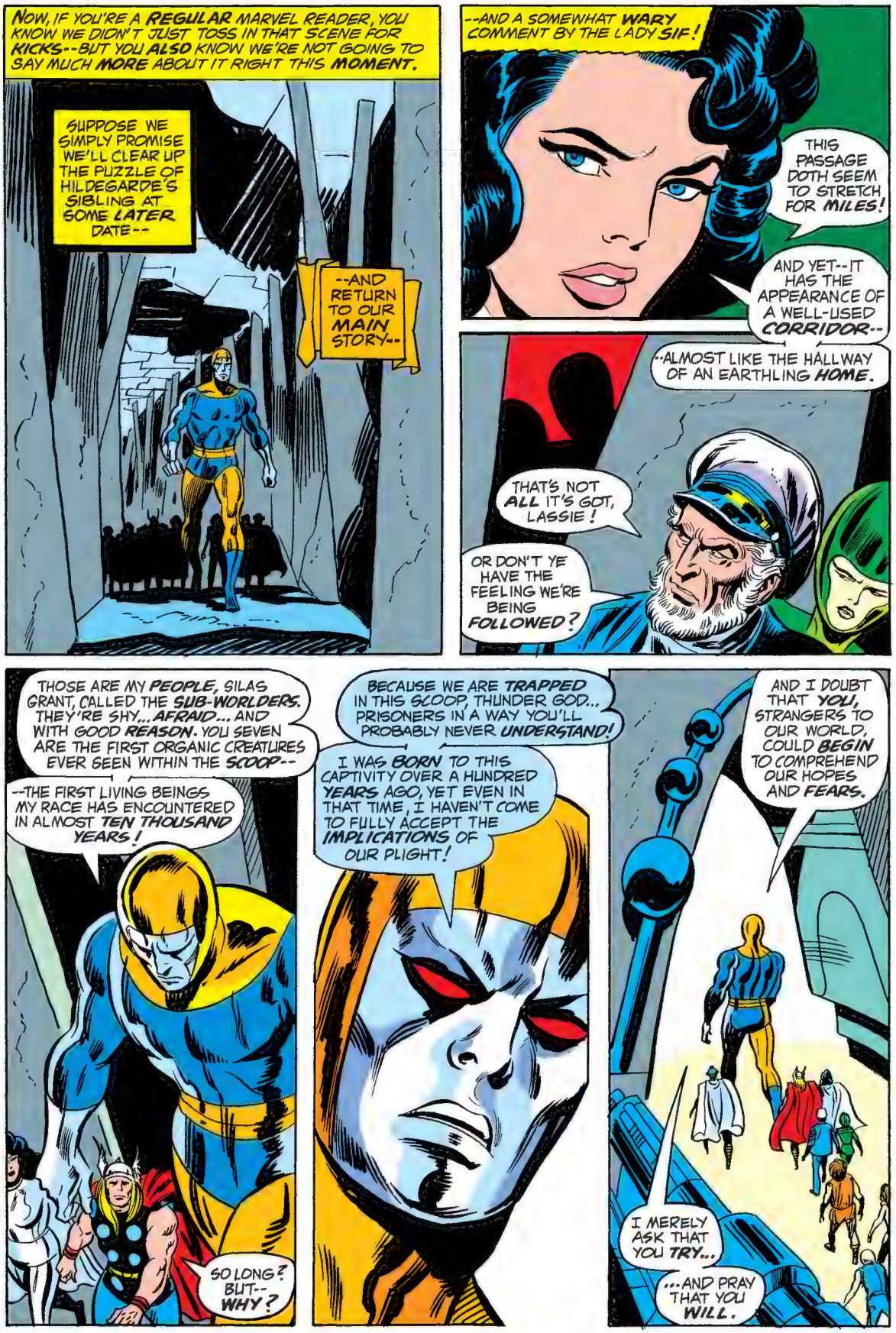

UNFORTUNATELY, THE MATTER IN QUESTION HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH UNREQUITED LOVE--BUT RATHER, WITH A CERTAIN JEWEL--
NOK!
NOK!

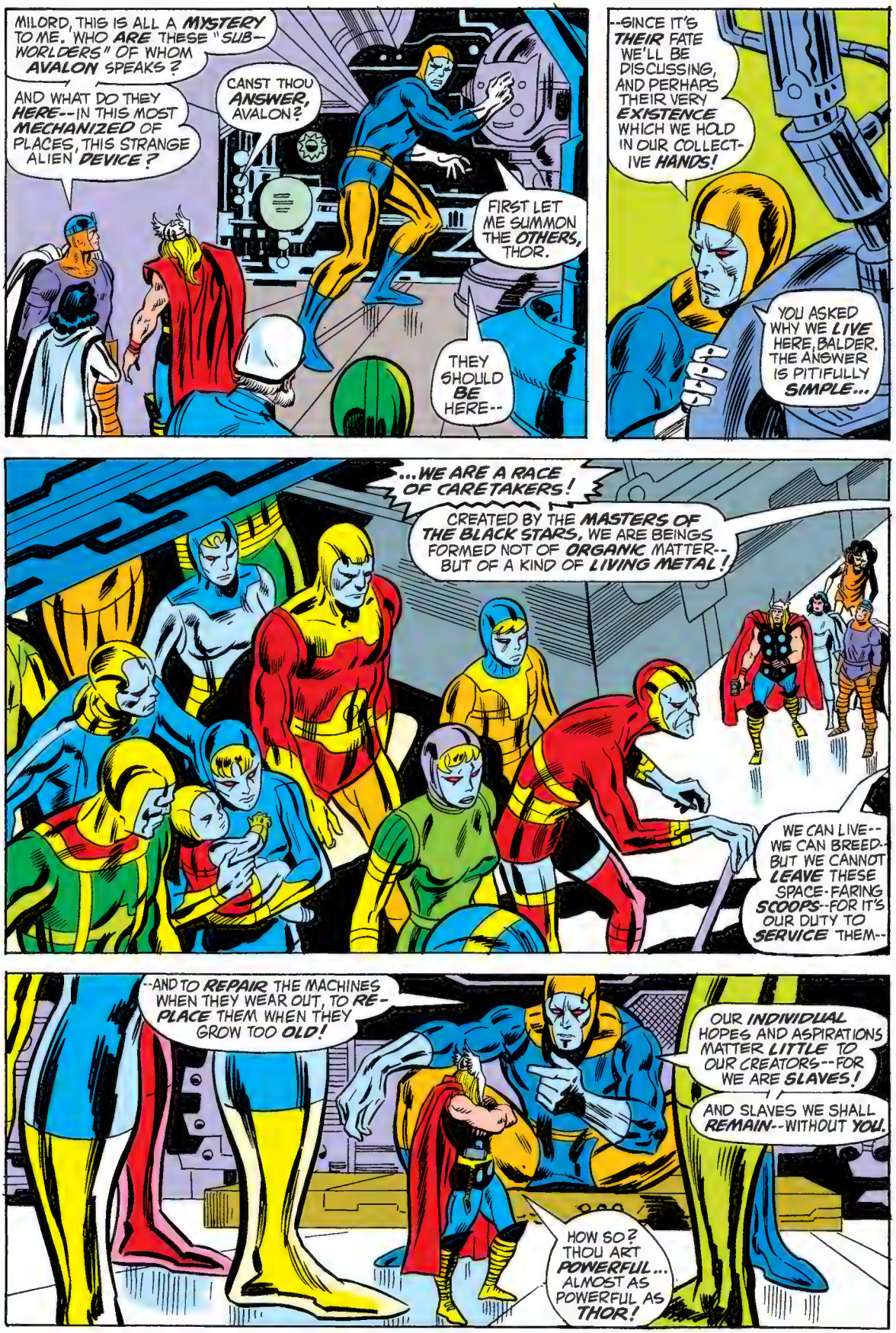

--A JEWEL DISCOVERED BY KRISTA IN THE WEST WOOD*, A JEWEL WHICH HAS BEEN EXERTING A STRANGE AND UNNATURAL INFLUENCE OVER THE YOUNG GIRL THESE PAST THREE DAYS--
* THOR #217 AGAIN. --RT.

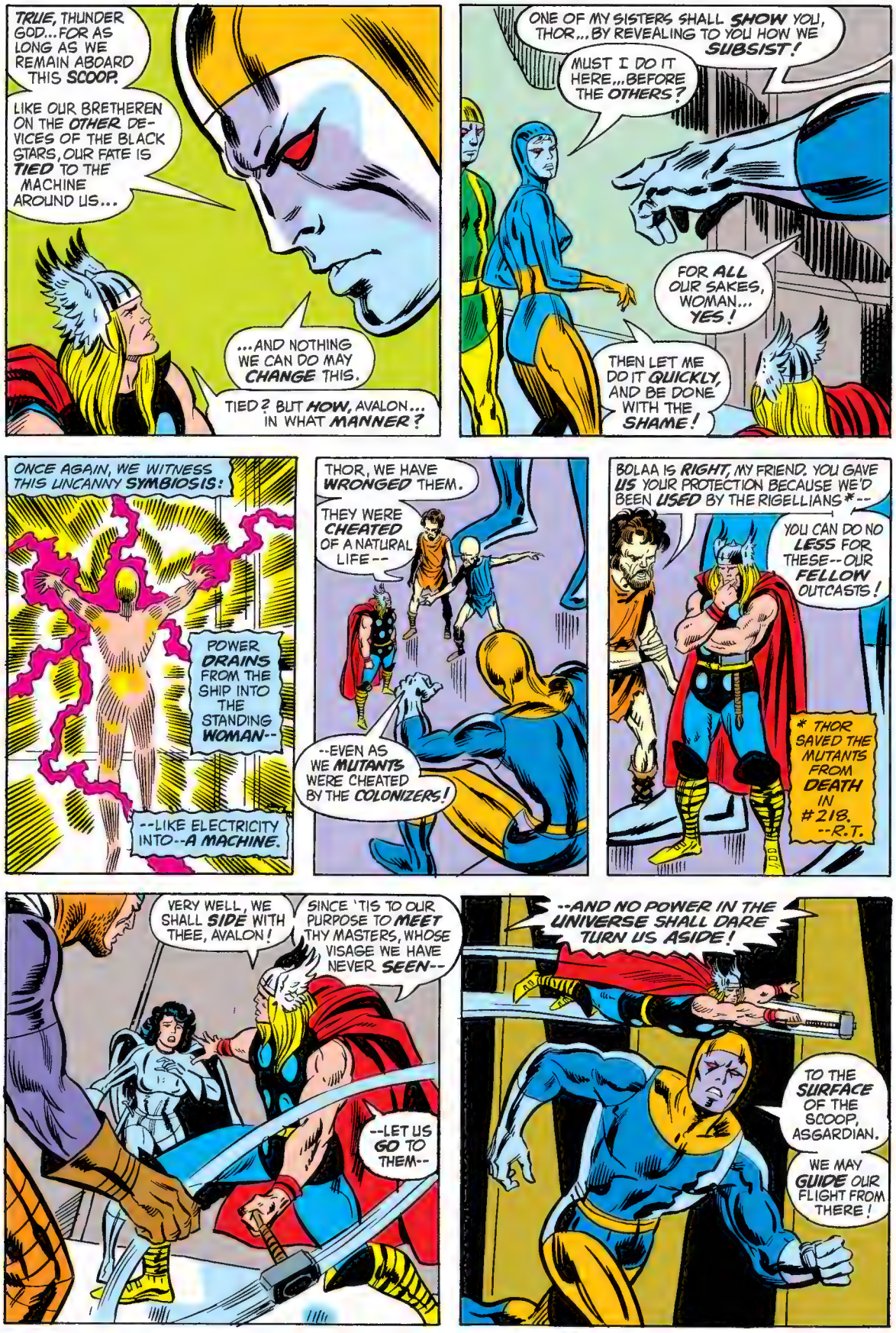
--AND WHICH NOW BURSTS BRILLIANTLY INTO PIERCING LIGHT!
KRISTA!

KRASH!

KRISTA...?
BUT BOTH GIRL AND JEWEL ARE..
GONE!


NOW, IF YOU'RE A REGULAR MARVEL READER, YOU KNOW WE DIDN'T JUST TOSS IN THAT SCENE FOR KICKS--BUT YOU ALSO KNOW WE'RE NOT GOING TO SAY MUCH MORE ABOUT IT RIGHT THIS MOMENT.
SUPPOSE WE SIMPLY PROMISE WE'LL CLEAR UP THE PUZZLE OF HILDEGARDE'S SIBLING AT SOME LATER DATE--
--AND RETURN TO OUR MAIN STORY--
--AND A SOMEWHAT WARY COMMENT BY THE LADY SIF!
THIS PASSAGE DOTH SEEM TO STRETCH FOR MILES!
AND YET--IT HAS THE APPEARANCE OF A WELL-USED CORRIDOR--
--ALMOST LIKE THE HALLWAY OF AN EARTHLING HOME.
THAT'S NOT ALL IT'S GOT, LASSIE!
OR DON'T YE HAVE THE FEELING WE'RE BEING FOLLOWED?
THOSE ARE MY PEOPLE, SILAS GRANT, CALLED THE SUB-WORLDERS. THEY'RE SHY... AFRAID... AND WITH GOOD REASON. YOU SEVEN ARE THE FIRST ORGANIC CREATURES EVER SEEN WITHIN THE SCOOP--
--THE FIRST LIVING BEINGS MY RACE HAS ENCOUNTERED IN ALMOST TEN THOUSAND YEARS!
SO LONG? BUT-- WHY?
BECAUSE WE ARE TRAPPED IN THIS SCOOP, THUNDER GOD... PRISONERS IN A WAY YOU'LL PROBABLY NEVER UNDERSTAND!
I WAS BORN TO THIS CAPTIVITY OVER A HUNDRED YEARS AGO, YET EVEN IN THAT TIME, I HAVEN'T COME TO FULLY ACCEPT THE IMPLICATIONS OF OUR PLIGHT!
AND I DOUBT THAT YOU, STRANGERS TO OUR WORLD, COULD BEGIN TO COMPREHEND OUR HOPES AND FEARS.
I MERELY ASK THAT YOU TRY...
...AND PRAY THAT YOU WILL.

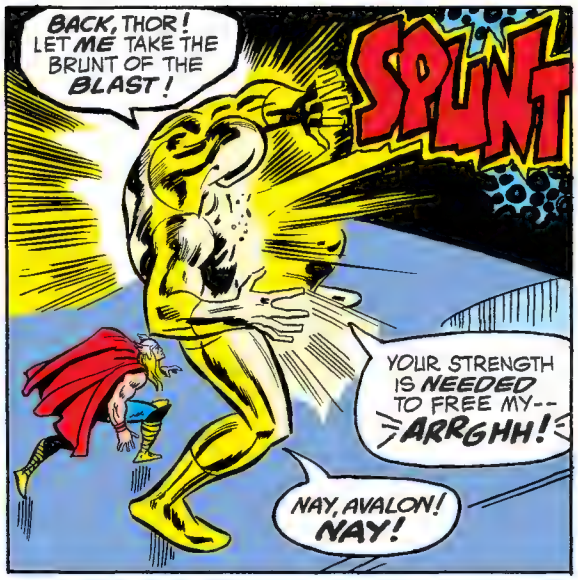

MILORD, THIS IS ALL A MYSTERY TO ME. WHO ARE THESE "SUB-WORLDERS" OF WHOM AVALON SPEAKS?
AND WHAT DO THEY HERE--IN THIS MOST MECHANIZED OF PLACES, THIS STRANGE ALIEN DEVICE?
CANST THOU ANSWER, AVALON?
FIRST LET ME SUMMON THE OTHERS, THOR.
THEY SHOULD BE HERE--
--SINCE IT'S THEIR FATE WE'LL BE DISCUSSING, AND PERHAPS THEIR VERY EXISTENCE WHICH WE HOLD IN OUR COLLECTIVE HANDS!
YOU ASKED WHY WE LIVE HERE, BALDER. THE ANSWER IS PITIFULLY SIMPLE...
...WE ARE A RACE OF CARETAKERS!
CREATED BY THE MASTERS OF THE BLACK STARS, WE ARE BEINGS FORMED NOT OF ORGANIC MATTER--BUT OF A KIND OF LIVING METAL!
WE CAN LIVE--WE CAN BREED--BUT WE CANNOT LEAVE THESE SPACE-FARING SCOOPS--FOR IT'S OUR DUTY TO SERVICE THEM--
--AND TO REPAIR THE MACHINES WHEN THEY WEAR OUT, TO REPLACE THEM WHEN THEY GROW TOO OLD!
OUR INDIVIDUAL HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS MATTER LITTLE TO OUR CREATORS--FOR WE ARE SLAVES!
AND SLAVES WE SHALL REMAIN--WITHOUT YOU.
HOW SO? THOU ART POWERFUL... ALMOST AS POWERFUL AS THOR!

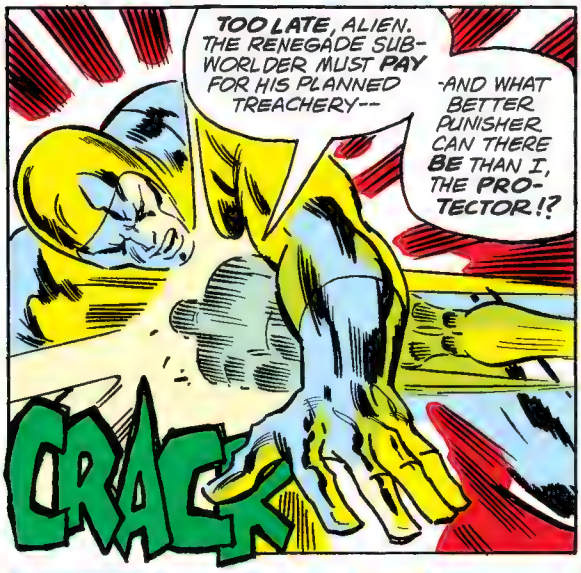

TRUE, THUNDER GOD...FOR AS LONG AS WE REMAIN ABOARD THIS SCOOP.
LIKE OUR BRETHEREN ON THE OTHER DEVICES OF THE BLACK STARS, OUR FATE IS TIED TO THE MACHINE AROUND US...
...AND NOTHING WE CAN DO MAY CHANGE THIS.
TIED? BUT HOW, AVALON... IN WHAT MANNER?
ONE OF MY SISTERS SHALL SHOW YOU, THOR... BY REVEALING TO YOU HOW WE SUBSIST!
MUST I DO IT HERE...BEFORE THE OTHERS?
FOR ALL OUR SAKES, WOMAN... YES!
THEN LET ME DO IT QUICKLY, AND BE DONE WITH THE SHAME!
ONCE AGAIN, WE WITNESS THIS UNCANNY SYMBIOSIS:
POWER DRAINS FROM THE SHIP INTO THE STANDING WOMAN--
--LIKE ELECTRICITY INTO--A MACHINE.
THOR, WE HAVE WRONGED THEM.
THEY WERE CHEATED OF A NATURAL LIFE--
--EVEN AS WE MUTANTS WERE CHEATED BY THE COLONIZERS!
BOLAA IS RIGHT, MY FRIEND. YOU GAVE US YOUR PROTECTION BECAUSE WE'D BEEN USED BY THE RIGELLIANS*--
YOU CAN DO NO LESS FOR THESE--OUR FELLOW OUTCASTS!
* THOR SAVED THE MUTANTS FROM DEATH IN #218. --R.T.
VERY WELL, WE SHALL SIDE WITH THEE, AVALON!
SINCE 'TIS TO OUR PURPOSE TO MEET THY MASTERS, WHOSE VISAGE WE HAVE NEVER SEEN--
--LET US GO TO THEM--
--AND NO POWER IN THE UNIVERSE SHALL DARE TURN US ASIDE!
TO THE SURFACE OF THE SCOOP, ASGARDIAN.
WE MAY GUIDE OUR FLIGHT FROM THERE!

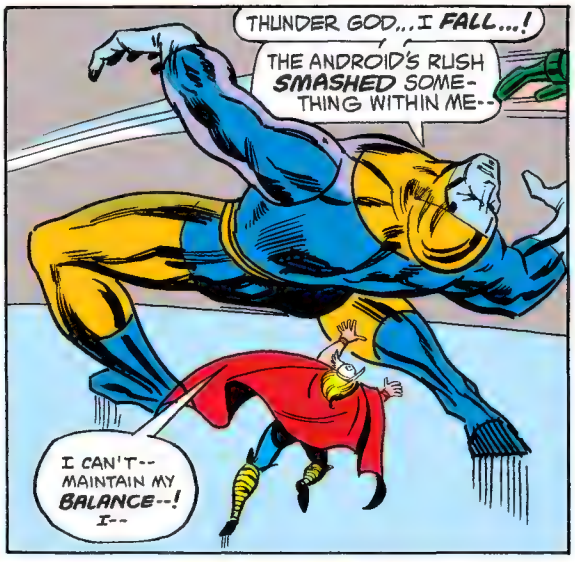
THE BLACK STARS: EACH A SPINNING SPHERE THE SIZE OF THREE JUPITERS, EACH THE SOURCE OF A TERROR WHICH HAS STRUCK DEEP INTO THE HEARTS OF THESE GODS AND MEN.
SET IN A BILLION-MILE-WIDE PENTAGON AROUND A GIANT BLAZING STAR, THESE FIVE PLANETS HAVE CROSSED THE YAWNING VOID OF INTRA-GALACTIC SPACE--AND NOW, ARRIVING IN OUR GALAXY, THEY REQUIRE ENERGY--
--ENERGY TO SURVIVE-- AND TO FUEL THEIR GIGANTIC SPACE DRIVE--
--ENERGY THEY CAN OBTAIN ONLY BY COMPLETELY DESTROYING ENTIRE SOLAR SYSTEMS--AND THEN COLLECTING THE COSMIC DEBRIS OF THAT DESTRUCTION IN MASSIVE SCOOPS--
--ONE OF WHICH NOW SUPPORTS TWO NEARLY MYTHIC FIGURES:
THOR, THE LIVING GOD OF THUNDER--
AND AVALON, KNIGHT OF THE INNER REALM!

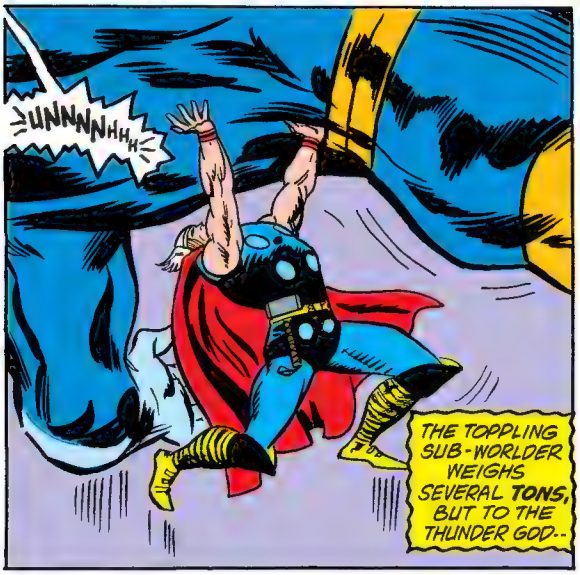
AS OUR HEROES DRAW CLOSER TO THE SURFACE OF THE MYSTERIOUS PLANET BELOW, THE SPACE SCOOP REWINDING ON ITS INCREDIBLE UMBILICAL CORD--
--SOMETHING MOVES ON THE CLOUDY SURFACE OF THE SO-CALLED "BLACK STAR"--
--SOMETHING SPHERICAL AND SOMEHOW VAGUELY THREATENING--
--SOMETHING WHICH SKIMS THROUGH DARK SPACE--
--APPROACHING OUR UNSUSPECTING ALLIES--
--AND SUBTLY CHANGING IN THE MIDST OF THAT APPROACH!
AS THE OVERSEAR PREDICTED--THE HOUR OF THE SUB-WORLDERS' BETRAYAL HAS ARRIVED!
AT LAST MY PURPOSE WILL BE FULFILLED. AT LAST I WILL DO THAT FOR WHICH I WAS CREATED.
SUCH IS THE DESTINY OF--
--THE PROTECTOR!
ASGARDIAN,,,BEFORE US, SOME STAR-SPANNING MONSTROSITY!
WHAT DOES IT MEAN? WHO IS THIS CREATURE?
DOST THOU MEAN--'TIS A STRANGER TO THEE?
COMPLETELY!
THEN, MY FRIEND--I FEAR FOR US BOTH--

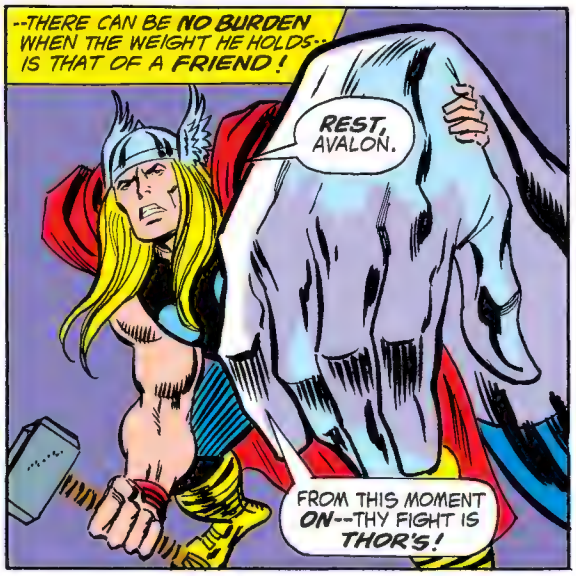
--FOR YON STRANGER DOTH ATTACK US--SO!
ZACK!


BACK, THOR! LET ME TAKE THE BRUNT OF THE BLAST!
SPLUNT
YOUR STRENGTH IS NEEDED TO FREE MY--
ARRGHH!
NAY, AVALON! NAY!


TOO LATE, ALIEN. THE RENEGADE SUB-WORLDER MUST PAY FOR HIS PLANNED TREACHERY--
-AND WHAT BETTER PUNISHER CAN THERE BE THAN I, THE PRO-TECTOR!?
CRACK

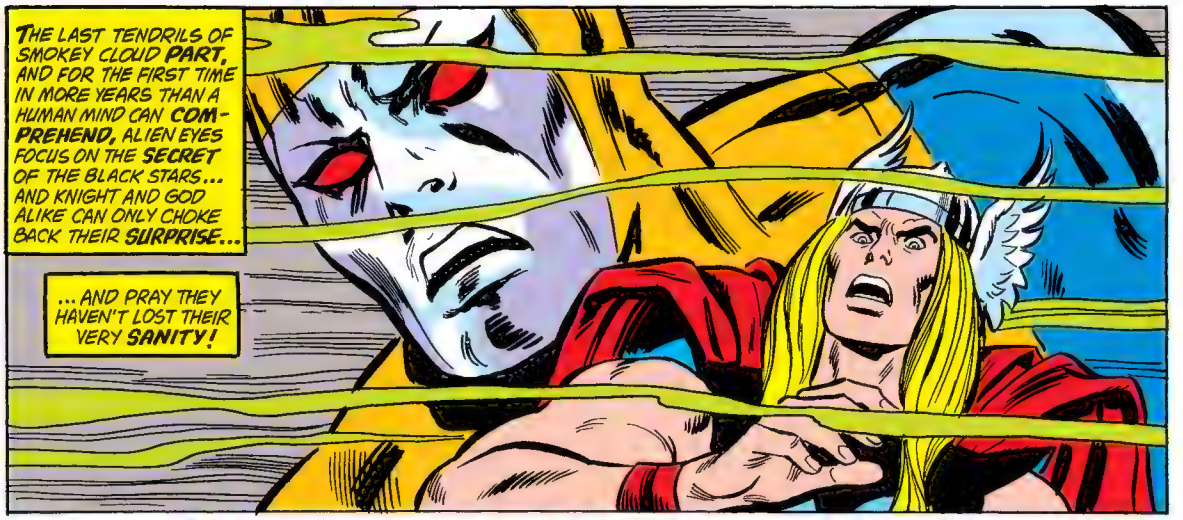

THUNDER GOD... I FALL...!
THE ANDROID'S RUSH SMASHED SOME-THING WITHIN ME--
I CAN'T-- MAINTAIN MY BALANCE--! I--


UNNNNHHH
THE TOPPLING SUB-WORLDER WEIGHS SEVERAL TONS, BUT TO THE THUNDER GOD--


--THERE CAN BE NO BURDEN WHEN THE WEIGHT HE HOLDS IS THAT OF A FRIEND!
REST, AVALON.
FROM THIS MOMENT ON--THY FIGHT IS THOR'S!

THAT WAS A FOOL-HARDY STATEMENT, STRANGER... ONE THAT WILL COST YOU YOUR LIFE!
NO CREATURE ALIVE CAN PREVAIL AGAINST THE STRENGTH OF THE PROTECTOR, FOR I HAVE BEEN CREATED BY THE MASTERS OF THE BLACK STARS TO DEFEAT ALL LIVING BEINGS--
--TO KEEP FOR THEM THE PEACE THEY SO HOTLY CRAVE--AND WHICH THEY SO GLORIOUSLY DESERVE!
THOU ART POWERFUL, 'TIS TRUE--
SPANG
--BUT 'TIS THOR WHOSE STRENGTH STANDS UNEQUALED!
'TIS THOR WHO HOLDS MJOLNIR--THE MALLET SUPREME!
BUT, SCARCELY HAS THOR STRUCK, WHEN--
BY ODIN'S BEARD! 'TIS IMPOSSIBLE!
THOU DIDST SHRUG OFF THAT FIERCE BLOW--AS THOUGH 'TWERE BY A FLEA!
PRECISELY, INTERLOPER!
YOU, HOWEVER, WILL NOT BE SO FORTUNATE!!
BADOOM!
I WAS CREATED TO PROTECT--AND THIS SHALL I DO!
AND NEITHER YOU--NOR THAT HUMANOID TRAITOR--HAS THE STRENGTH AND GILE TO STOP ME!

BUT IN CASE YOU STILL THINK OTHERWISE--
--I WILL PROVE MYSELF--
--BY CRUSHING YOU!
YET, BEFORE THOSE MIGHTY HANDS CAN CLOSE--
--A MYSTIC HAMMER LIFTS--
--AND FALLS!
WHAMO!
NO! IT ISN'T POSSIBLE! YOU WERE DEFEATED-- YOU WERE-- KKKLLLNNGGG!
KRAM!
LET THIS BE THY FINAL LESSON, MONSTER--
KALOOM!
--NO MAN IS E'ER DEFEATED TILL HIS LAST BREATH IS DRAWN!
AND E'EN THEN, 'TIS MOST UNWISE FOR THE VICTOR TO ASSUME THE BATTLE IS ENDED--
--FOR WITH GOD AND MAN, A WAR IS NE'ER OVER--TILL THE ULTIMATE WRONG IS SET ARIGHT--
CHOOM!
--AND THE FINAL VILLAIN IS DONE!
AND SO THE SPACE-SCOOP CONTINUES TO JOURNEY TOWARD ITS PLACE OF ORIGIN, THE MIST-CLOUDED SURFACE OF A BLACK STAR... A SURFACE WHICH DRAWS EVER NEARER, ITS DARK MYSTERY ABOUT TO BE REVEALED...
I'M PLEASED THE PROTECTOR'S ASSAULT ONLY STUNNED ME, THOR--FOR I'VE NEVER SEEN THE SURFACE OF MY MASTER'S WORLD!
DIDST THOU SPEND THY LIFE WITHIN THIS SHIP?
FROM BIRTH! I NEVER... WAIT!
THE MISTS ARE CLEARING... WE'RE THERE! THE SURFACE OF THE BLACK STAR!


THE LAST TENDRILS OF SMOKEY CLOUD PART, AND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MORE YEARS THAN A HUMAN MIND CAN COMPREHEND, ALIEN EYES FOCUS ON THE SECRET OF THE BLACK STARS... AND KNIGHT AND GOD ALIKE CAN ONLY CHOKE BACK THEIR SURPRISE...
...AND PRAY THEY HAVEN'T LOST THEIR VERY SANITY!

NEXT MONTH:
KRAGONN,
DARK LORD of the OUTER REALM!
KRAKK!
TO BE CONTINUED!

THOR
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
20¢
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THE MIGHTY
THOR
FOR MY UNIVERSE TO LIVE--
--THE GOD OF THUNDER MUST DIE!
THE SINISTER SECRET OF AVALON!!
THE KEEPER OF THE INNER COSMOS!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE MIGHTY THOR!™

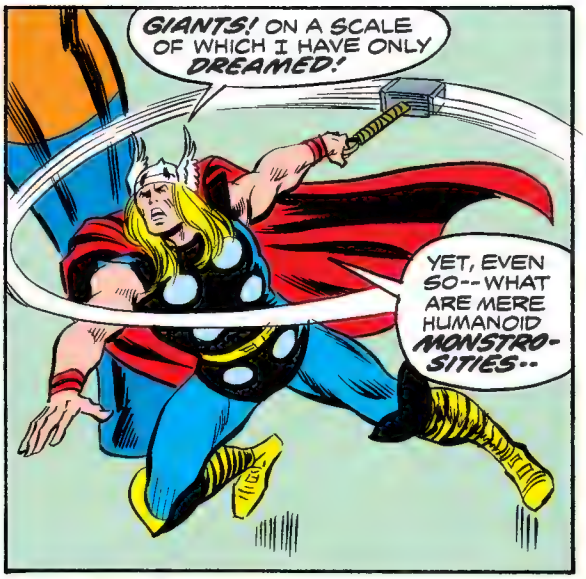
GERRY CONWAY / SCRIPTER | JOHN BUSCEMA / ARTIST | MIKE ESPOSITO / EMBELLISHER | JOHN COSTANZA, letterer / GLYNIS WEIN, colorist | ROY THOMAS, / EDITOR

BEHOLD! the land of DOOM!
BY THE GODS OF RHUN!
QUICKLY, THOR--TURN BACK! NOT EVEN YOU CAN DEFEAT THESE MASTERS OF THE BLACK STAR!
I SAY THEE NAY!
NEVER SHALL THE GOD OF THUNDER FLEE FROM ANY FOE--NOT EVEN SUCH AS THESE!
I DIDST PLEDGE THEE MY AID AGAINST THY MASTERS, FRIEND AVALON--AND MY AID SHALT THOU RECEIVE!
SO SPEAKS THOR, SON OF ODIN--

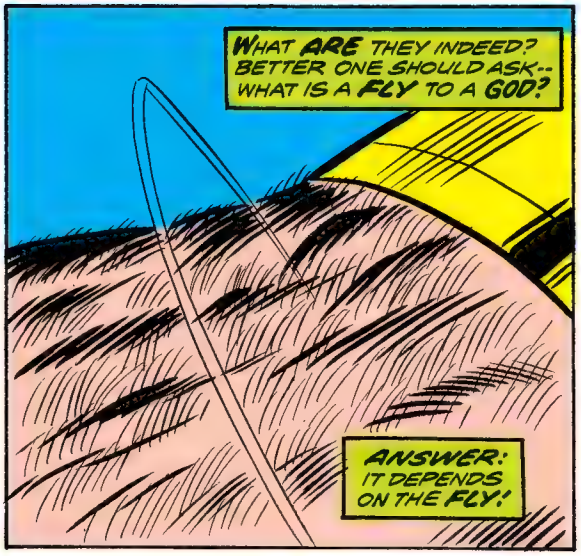
LAST ISSUE, FOR THOSE UNFORTUNATES WHO MISSED IT, THOR AND HIS COMPANIONS BEGAN THE QUEST TO LEARN THE DREAD SECRET BEHIND THE WORLD-CONSUMING BLACK STARS! ACCOMPANIED BY THE MUTANT OUTCASTS OF THE COLONIZERS, THOR AND HIS FELLOW ASGARDIANS APPROACHED A DEBRIS-COLLECTING SPACE SCOOP -- A DEVICE SENT OUT FROM THE BLACK STARS TO GATHER THE REMAINS OF SHATTERED PLANETS, FOR USE AS FUEL -- AND THERE MET AVALON, THE LEADER OF A RACE OF CARETAKERS WHO LIVED WITHIN THE SPACE SCOOP, UNDER BONDAGE TO THE MASTERS OF THE BLACK STARS!

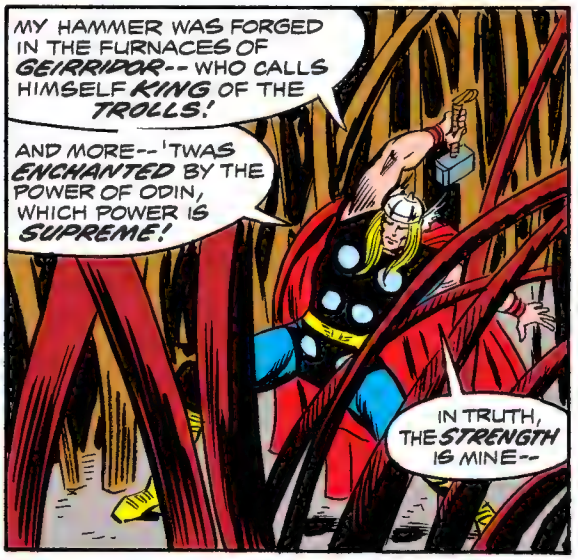
--AND YEA, THE GOD OF THUNDER!

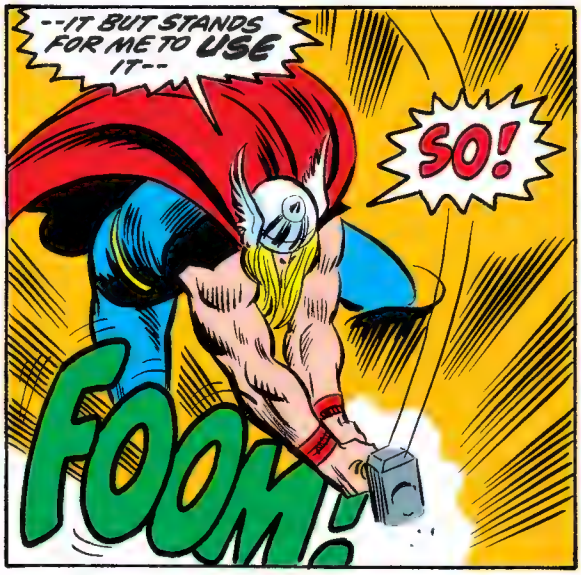
NOW, AFTER BATTLING A PROTECTOR -- A GIANT ANDROID PROGRAMMED TO GUARD THE STAR-PLANETS FROM INVASION -- THOR AND AVALON HAVE DESCENDED TO THE SURFACE OF THE IMMENSE WORLD -- AND THERE DISCOVERED THE AWESOME TRUTH ABOUT THE INHABITANTS OF THIS FIVE-PLANET STAR SYSTEM:


GIANTS! ON A SCALE OF WHICH I HAVE ONLY DREAMED!
YET, EVEN SO--WHAT ARE MERE HUMANOID MONSTRO-SITIES--

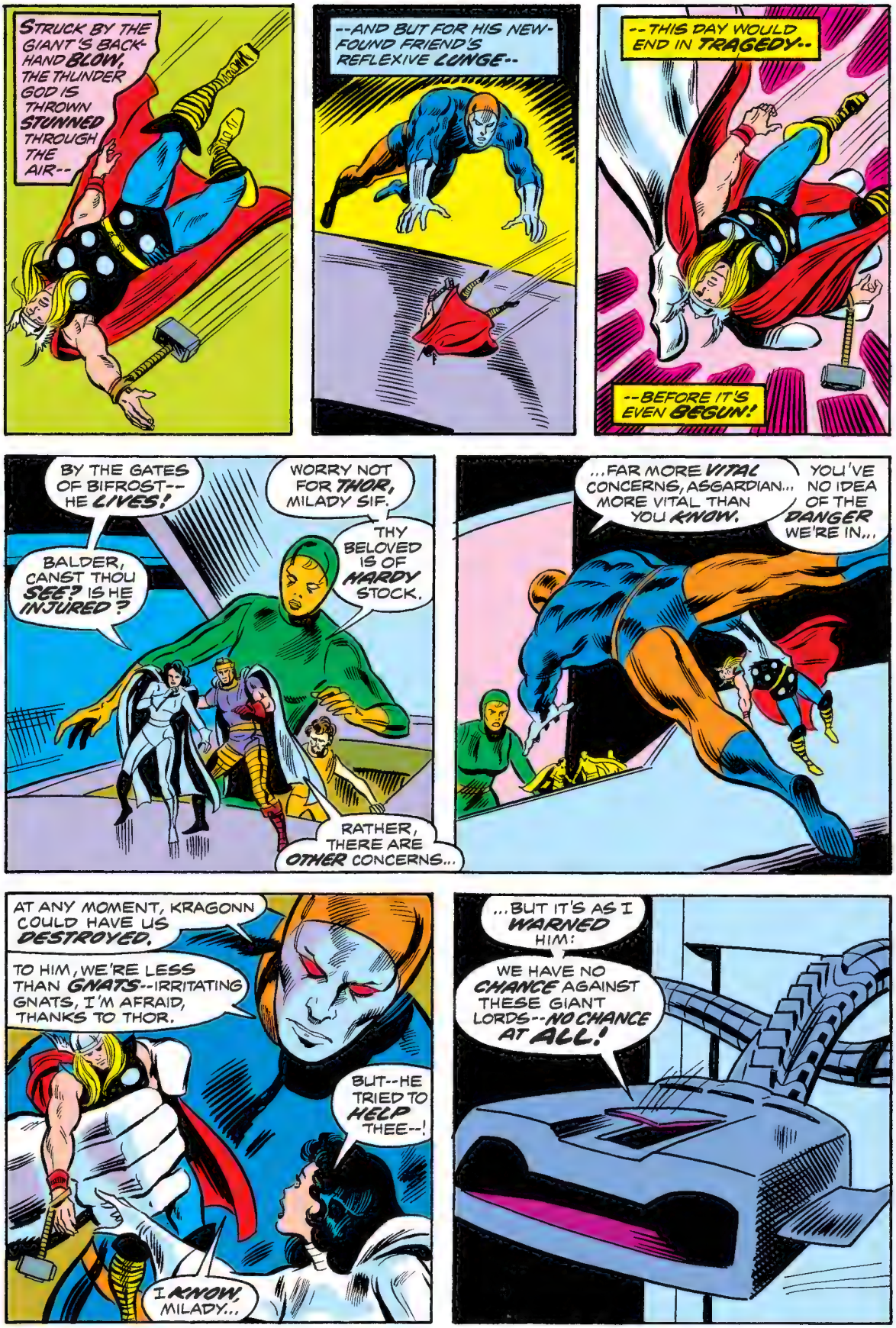
--TO HIM WHO WIELDETH THE URU MALLET, MJOLNIR!

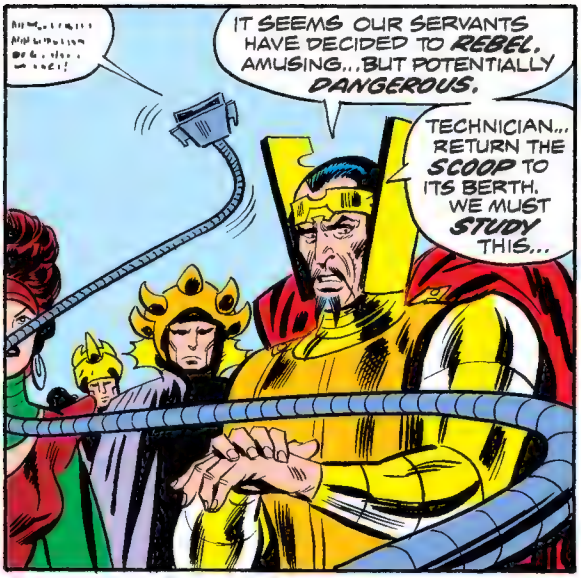

WHAT ARE THEY INDEED? BETTER ONE SHOULD ASK--WHAT IS A FLY TO A GOD?
ANSWER: IT DEPENDS ON THE FLY!

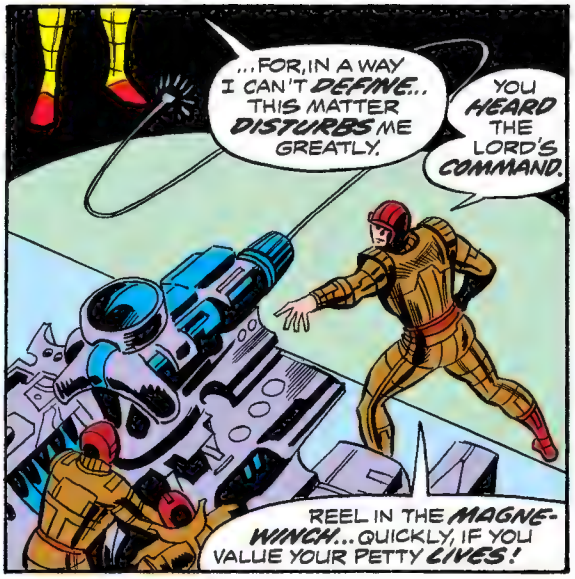

MY HAMMER WAS FORGED IN THE FURNACES OF GEIRRIDOR--WHO CALLS HIMSELF KING OF THE TROLLS!
AND MORE--'TWAS ENCHANTED BY THE POWER OF ODIN, WHICH POWER IS SUPREME!
IN TRUTH, THE STRENGTH IS MINE--

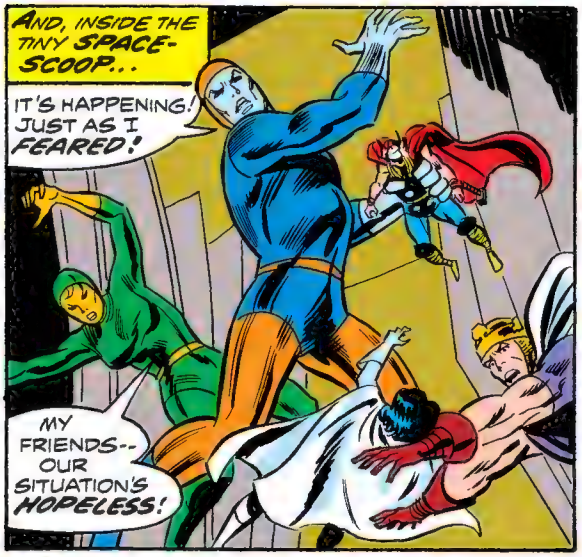

--IT BUT STANDS FOR ME TO USE IT--
SO!
FOOM!

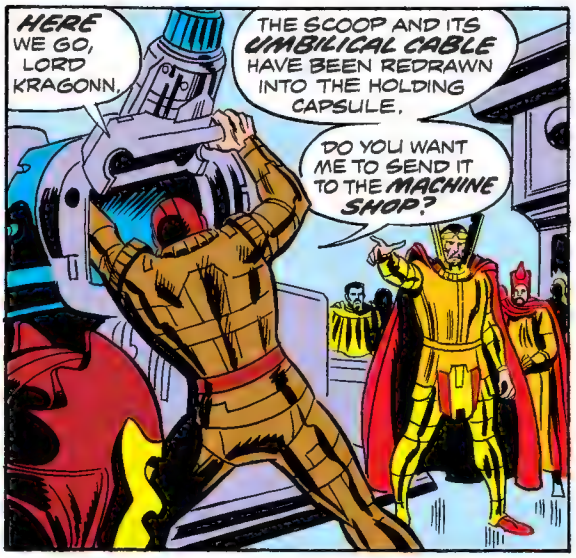
YOU DARE ATTACK KRAGONN, WHOSE PRESENCE DIMS THE SUN?
IMPUDENT FLEA!
SWAK!
OFF WITH YOU--YOU CURSED LITTLE BUG! AWAY! AWAY!


STRUCK BY THE GIANT'S BACK-HAND BLOW, THE THUNDER GOD IS THROWN STUNNED THROUGH THE AIR--
--AND BUT FOR HIS NEW-FOUND FRIEND'S REFLEXIVE LUNGE--
--THIS DAY WOULD END IN TRAGEDY--
--BEFORE IT'S EVEN BEGUN!
BY THE GATES OF BIFROST--HE LIVES!
WORRY NOT FOR THOR, MILADY SIF.
THY BELOVED IS OF HARDY STOCK.
BALDER, CANST THOU SEE? IS HE INJURED?
RATHER, THERE ARE OTHER CONCERNS...
...FAR MORE VITAL CONCERNS, ASGARDIAN... MORE VITAL THAN YOU KNOW.
YOU'VE NO IDEA OF THE DANGER WE'RE IN...
AT ANY MOMENT, KRAGONN COULD HAVE US DESTROYED.
TO HIM, WE'RE LESS THAN GNATS--IRRITATING GNATS, I'M AFRAID, THANKS TO THOR.
BUT--HE TRIED TO HELP THEE--!
I KNOW, MILADY...
...BUT IT'S AS I WARNED HIM:
WE HAVE NO CHANCE AGAINST THESE GIANT LORDS--NO CHANCE AT ALL!


IT SEEMS OUR SERVANTS HAVE DECIDED TO REBEL. AMUSING...BUT POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS.
TECHNICIAN... RETURN THE SCOOP TO ITS BERTH. WE MUST STUDY THIS...


...FOR, IN A WAY I CAN'T DEFINE... THIS MATTER DISTURBS ME GREATLY.
YOU HEARD THE LORD'S COMMAND.
REEL IN THE MAGNE-WINCH... QUICKLY, IF YOU VALUE YOUR PETTY LIVES!

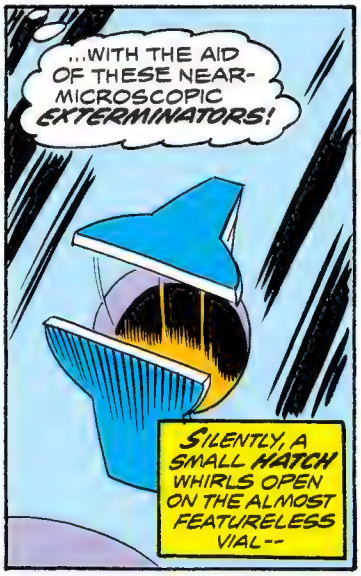

AND, INSIDE THE TINY SPACE-SCOOP...
IT'S HAPPENING! JUST AS I FEARED!
MY FRIENDS-- OUR SITUATION'S HOPELESS!


HERE WE GO, LORD KRAGONN.
THE SCOOP AND ITS UMBILICAL CABLE HAVE BEEN REDRAWN INTO THE HOLDING CAPSULE.
DO YOU WANT ME TO SEND IT TO THE MACHINE SHOP?

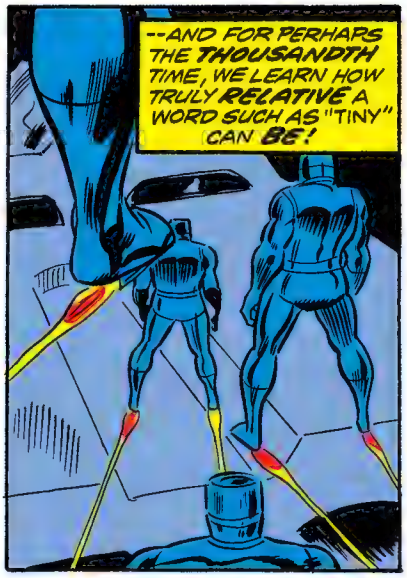
WE MUST LEARN THE REASON FOR OUR SLAVES' REBELLION... AND FOR THAT, WE MUST TURN TO THEIR CREATOR.
HE WILL LEARN THE CAUSE...
...OR PAY FOR THE FAILURE WITH HIS MISERABLE LIFE!
ISN'T THAT SO--

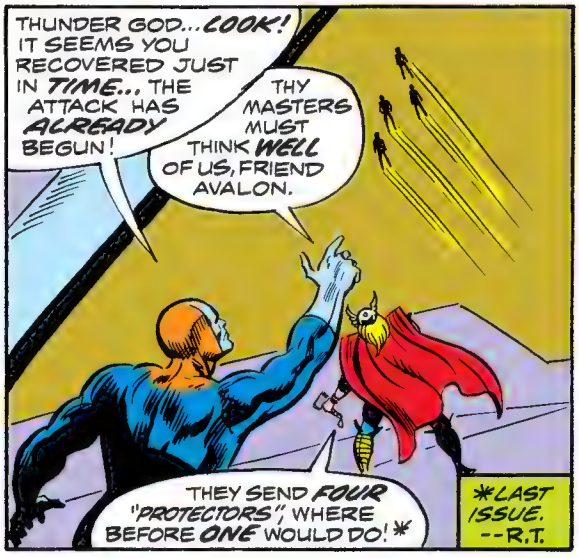
..."MILORD" DRACUS?
LORD KRAGONN, YOU FLATTER ME. EVERY-ONE KNOWS THAT DRACUS IS A LOWLY FREEMAN... NOT A NOBLE, SUCH AS YOUR GLORIOUS SELF.
I MERELY WISH TO SERVE... IN ANY WAY I CAN.
DON'T GAME WITH ME, DRACUS. YOU SERVE ONLY YOURSELF.
YOUR GOALS SIMPLY MATCH MY OWN...

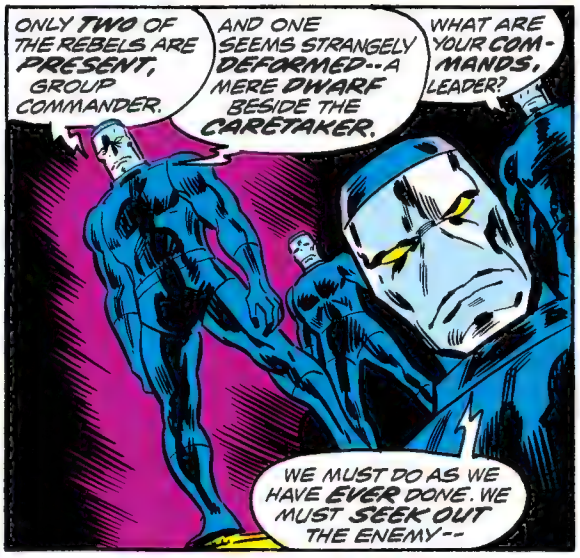
...AND IT'S FOR THAT REASON ALONE THAT I LET YOU LIVE.
MILORD IS MOST GENEROUS.
...A GENEROUS FOOL! HE AND ALL THE OTHERS OF HIS CLASS...
...ALWAYS MOCKING ME BECAUSE THEY ARE NOBLE-BRED, AND I AM BUT A HUMBLE SCHOLAR! THEY'LL PAY FOR THEIR INSOLENCE...
...THEY'LL LEARN THE FOLLY OF THEIR LAUGHTER, WHEN DRACUS CHAINS THEM ALL!
YET... HOW SHALL I CHAIN THEM, WHEN THEY HOLD ALL THE REINS OF POWER?
WHAT CAN LOWLY DRACUS DO AGAINST THE MIGHTY LORDS OF THE PLANET RHUN?
PERHAPS THE ANSWER LIES HERE--WITHIN THIS TINY CAPSULE, AMONG ITS ANDROID VERMIN!
I CREATED THESE BEINGS TO CARETAKE OUR SPACE-SCOOPS... BUT THAT WAS MANY KLARNS* AGO, AND NO DOUBT, MUCH HAS CHANGED.
*ONE KLARN IS ROUGHLY EQUAL TO TEN EARTH-YEARS. --RELIABLE ROY.
PERHAPS I SHOULD TEST MY TINY CREATURES...
NO DOUBT THEY'VE GROWN MORE POWERFUL...
...AND IT COULD NOT HARM ME TO LEARN THE EXTENT OF THAT EVOLUTION...


...WITH THE AID OF THESE NEAR-MICROSCOPIC EXTERMINATORS!
SILENTLY, A SMALL HATCH WHIRLS OPEN ON THE ALMOST FEATURELESS VIAL--

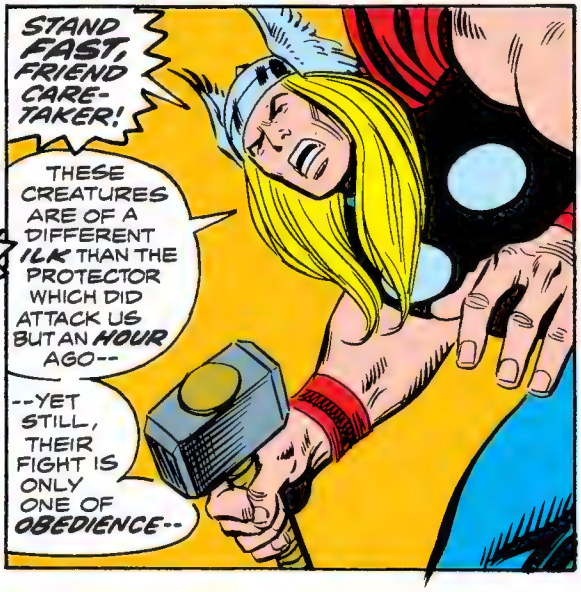
--AS SEVERAL TINY FORMS MAKE A WHISPERING EXIT--


--AND FOR PERHARS THE THOUSANDTH TIME, WE LEARN HOW TRULY RELATIVE A WORD SUCH AS "TINY" CAN BE!

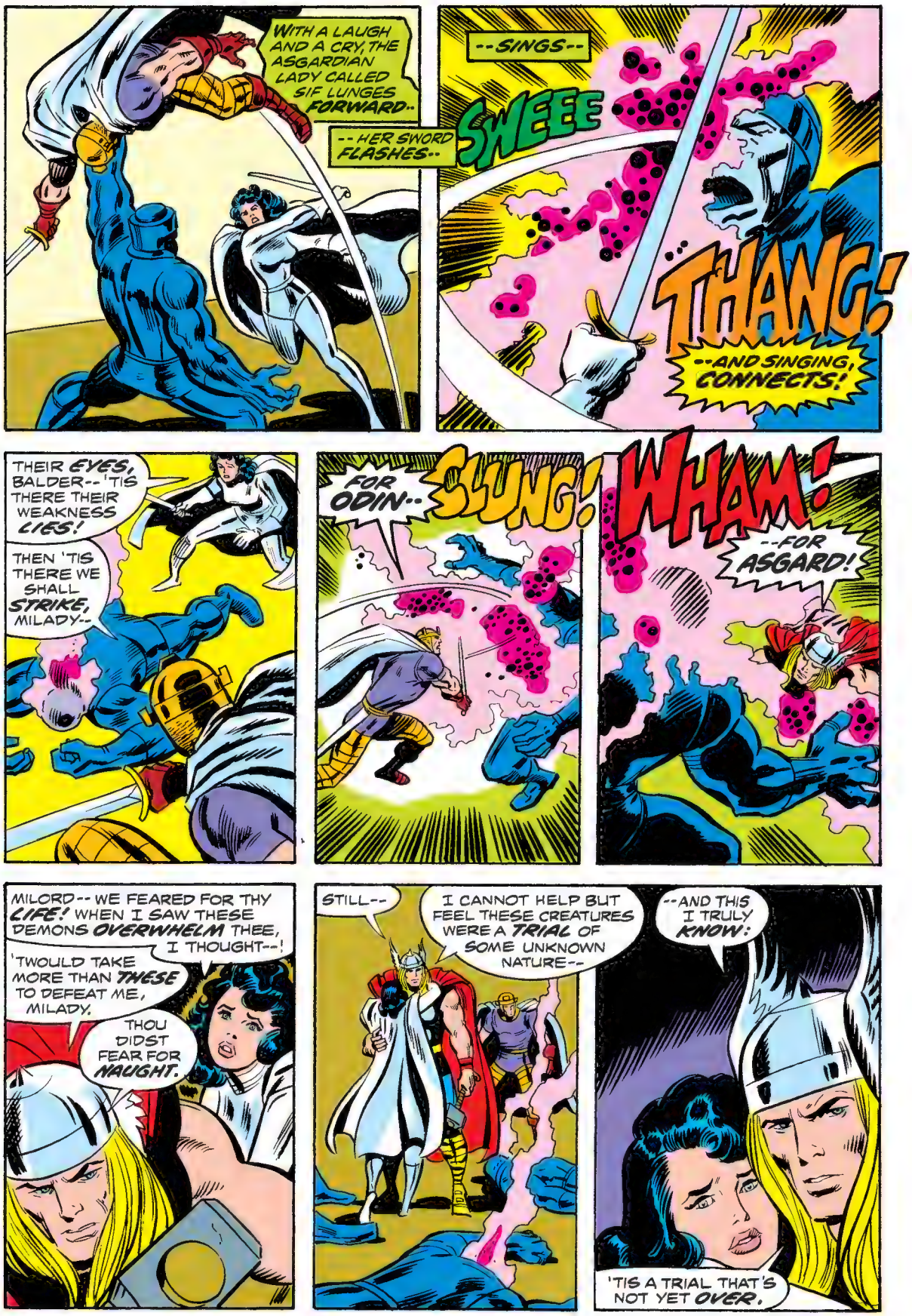

THUNDER GOD...LOOK! IT SEEMS YOU RECOVERED JUST IN TIME... THE ATTACK HAS ALREADY BEGUN!
THY MASTERS MUST THINK WELL OF US, FRIEND AVALON.
THEY SEND FOUR "PROTECTORS", WHERE BEFORE ONE WOULD DO! *
*LAST ISSUE. --R.T.

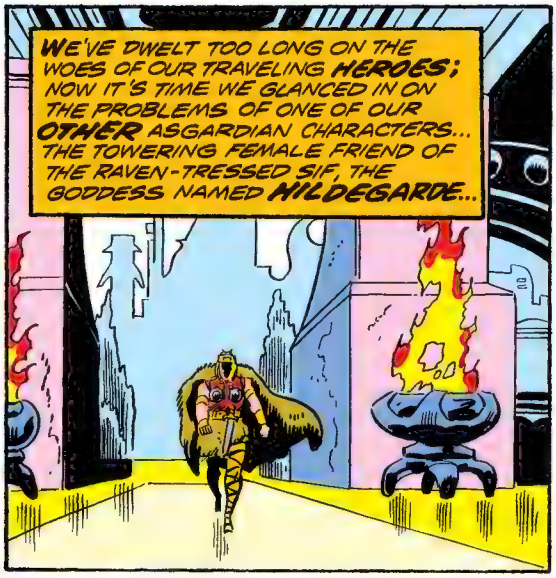

ONLY TWO OF THE REBELS ARE PRESENT, GROUP COMMANDER.
AND ONE SEEMS STRANGELY DEFORMED--A MERE DWARF BESIDE THE CARETAKER.
WHAT ARE YOUR COMMANDS, LEADER?
WE MUST DO AS WE HAVE EVER DONE. WE MUST SEEK OUT THE ENEMY--

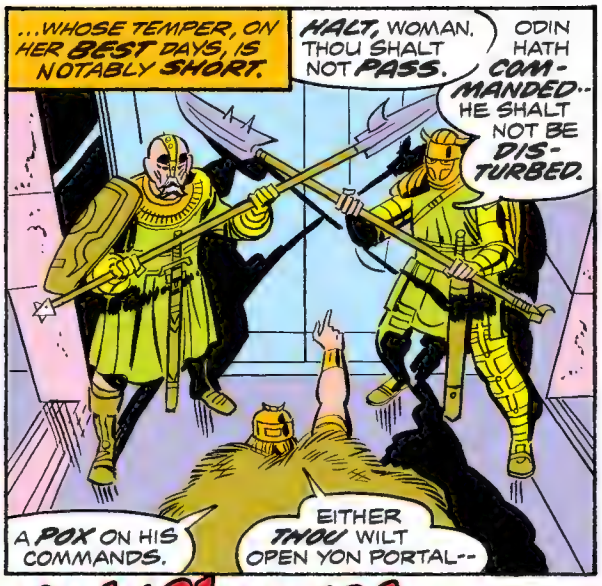
--EXTERMINATE--
DESTROY!
SPRANG!

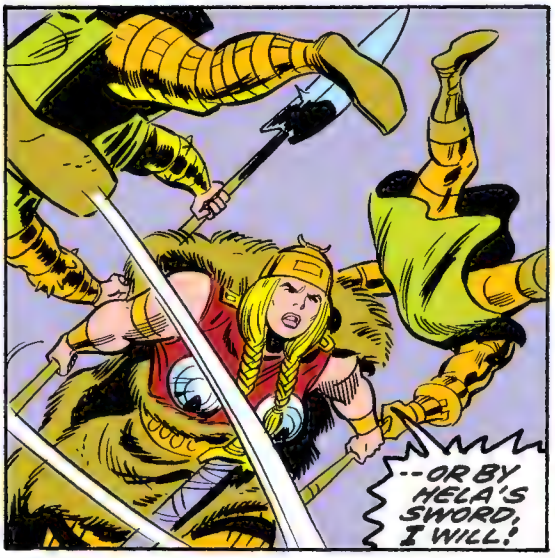

STAND FAST, FRIEND CARE-TAKER!
THESE CREATURES ARE OF A DIFFERENT ILK THAN THE PROTECTOR WHICH DID ATTACK US BUT AN HOUR AGO--
--YET STILL, THEIR FIGHT IS ONLY ONE OF OBEDIENCE--

--WHILE MEN AND GODS DOTH STRIKE FOR REASONS OF GREATER GLORY: FOR DUTY, FOR HONOR--
FOR DESTINY!
SWANG!
CHUNK!
WORDS OF THE FLESH, SMALL ONE.
WHAT MEANING HAVE THEY FOR AN EXTERMINATOR--?
--WHOSE MIND IS SHUT--
--WHOSE BODY IS POWER!
BARUM
YET, EVEN AS THOR STAGGERS OFF-BALANCE, A TREMENDOUS SHOUT ECHOES FROM THE HALF-OPENED HATCH, WHERE--
THE BATTLE IS HERE, MILADY-- WE WERE FOOLS TO WAIT BELOW--
--BUT EVEN FOOLS MAY LEARN THEIR FOLLY-- EH, MILADY SIF?
BRING!
QUITE SO, LORD BALDER!
IT'S A LESSON WE MIGHT PASS ON!

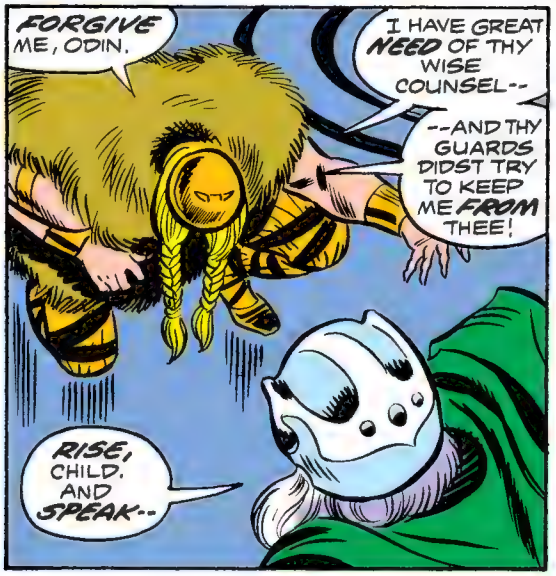

WITH A LAUGH AND A CRY, THE ASGARDIAN LADY CALLED SIF LUNGES FORWARD..
--HER SWORD FLASHES..
--SINGS--
SWEEE
THANG!
--AND SINGING, CONNECTS!
THEIR EYES, BALDER--'TIS THERE THEIR WEAKNESS LIES!
THEN 'TIS THERE WE SHALL STRIKE, MILADY--
FOR ODIN..
SLUNG!
WHAM!
--FOR ASGARD!
MILORD--WE FEARED FOR THY LIFE! WHEN I SAW THESE DEMONS OVERWHELM THEE, I THOUGHT--!
'TWOULD TAKE MORE THAN THESE TO DEFEAT ME, MILADY.
THOU DIDST FEAR FOR NAUGHT.
STILL--
I CANNOT HELP BUT FEEL THESE CREATURES WERE A TRIAL OF SOME UNKNOWN NATURE--
--AND THIS I TRULY KNOW:
'TIS A TRIAL THAT'S NOT YET OVER.

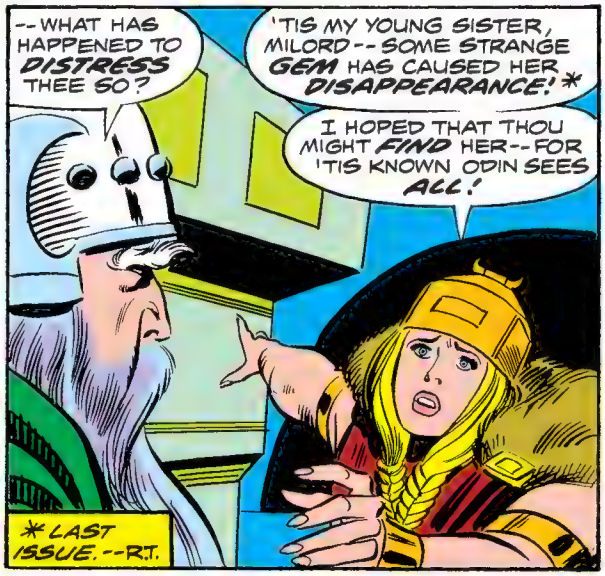

WE'VE DWELT TOO LONG ON THE WOES OF OUR TRAVELING HEROES; NOW IT'S TIME WE GLANCED IN ON THE PROBLEMS OF ONE OF OUR OTHER ASGARDIAN CHARACTERS... THE TOWERING FEMALE FRIEND OF THE RAVEN-TRESSED SIF, THE GODDESS NAMED HILDEGARDE...

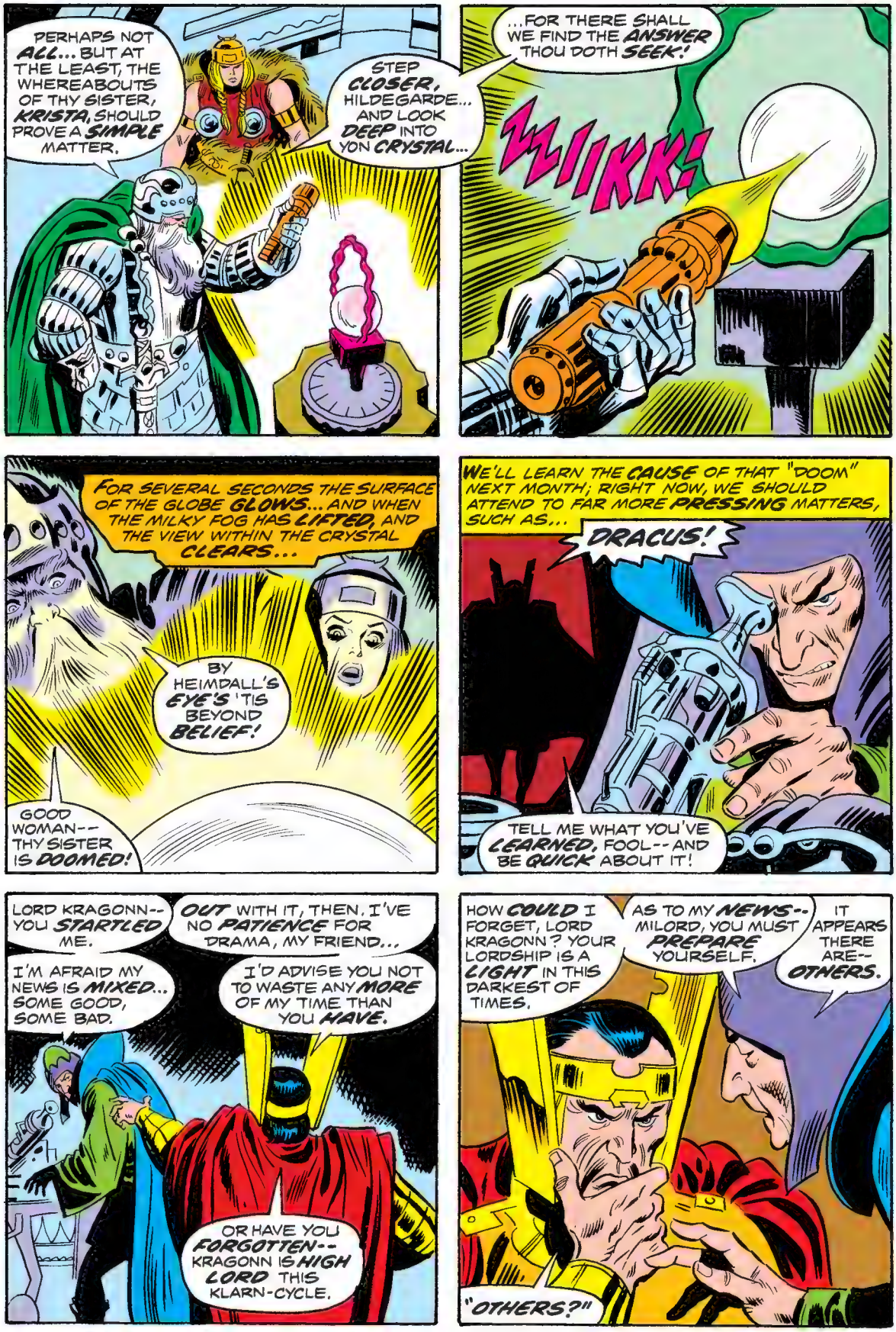

...WHOSE TEMPER, ON HER BEST DAYS, IS NOTABLY SHORT.
HALT, WOMAN. THOU SHALT NOT PASS.
ODIN HATH COMMANDED-- HE SHALT NOT BE DISTURBED.
A POX ON HIS COMMANDS.
EITHER THOU WILT OPEN YON PORTAL--


--OR BY HELA'S SWORD, I WILL!

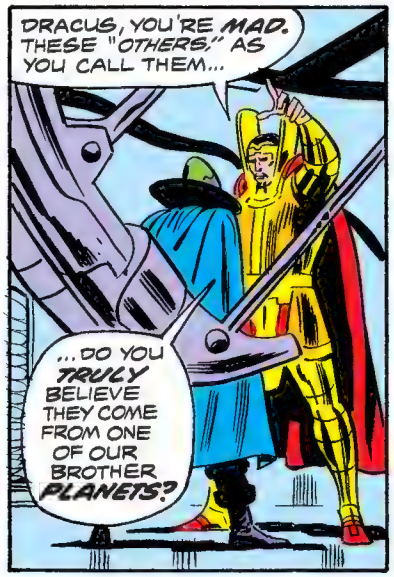
CRUMP! THUD!
VIZIER, THOSE SOUNDS-- CANST THOU DIVINE THEIR MEANING?
MILORD ODIN, I CANNOT!
THAN I SHALL, 'TWERE THE GUARDS, VIZIER.
AND HERE DOTH COME THEIR ATTACKER.

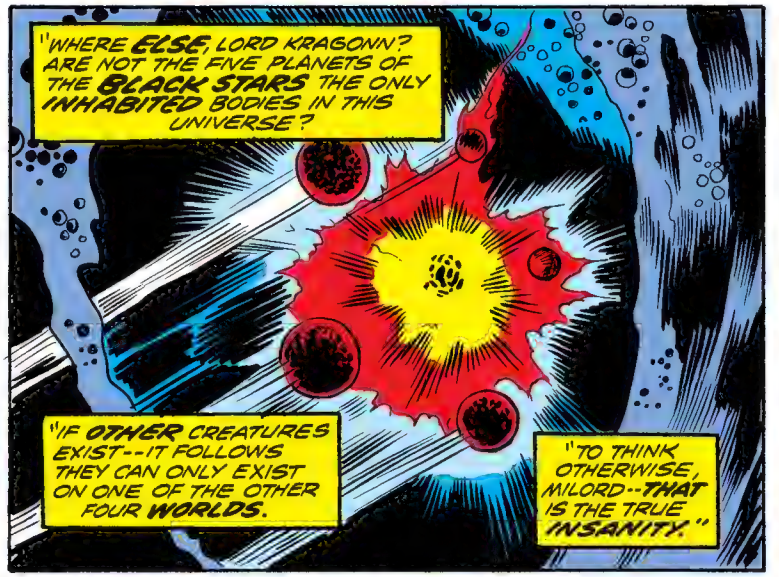

FORGIVE ME, ODIN.
I HAVE GREAT NEED OF THY WISE COUNSEL--
--AND THY GUARDS DIDST TRY TO KEEP ME FROM THEE!
RISE, CHILD, AND SPEAK--

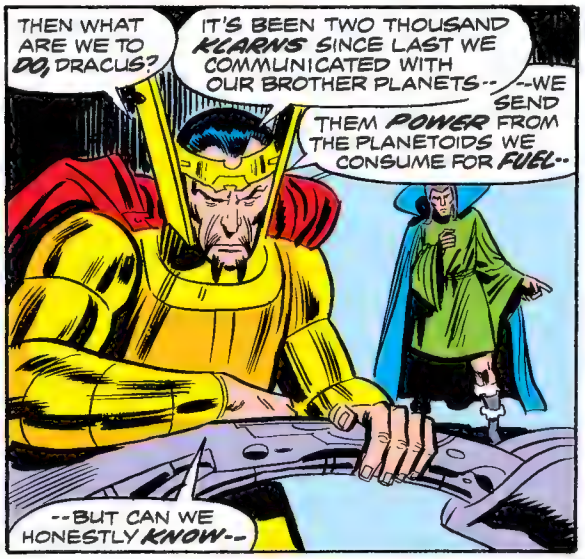

--WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO DISTRESS THEE SO?
'TIS MY YOUNG SISTER, MILORD -- SOME STRANGE GEM HAS CAUSED HER DISAPPEARANCE! *
I HOPED THAT THOU MIGHT FIND HER -- FOR 'TIS KNOWN ODIN SEES ALL!
* LAST ISSUE. --R.T.


PERHAPS NOT ALL... BUT AT THE LEAST, THE WHEREABOUTS OF THY SISTER, KRISTA, SHOULD PROVE A SIMPLE MATTER.
STEP CLOSER, HILDEGARDE... AND LOOK DEEP INTO YON CRYSTAL...
...FOR THERE SHALL WE FIND THE ANSWER THOU DOTH SEEK!
ZZIKK!
FOR SEVERAL SECONDS THE SURFACE OF THE GLOBE GLOWS... AND WHEN THE MILKY FOG HAS LIFTED, AND THE VIEW WITHIN THE CRYSTAL CLEARS...
BY HEIMDALL'S EYE'S 'TIS BEYOND BELIEF!
GOOD WOMAN-- THY SISTER IS DOOMED!
WE'LL LEARN THE CAUSE OF THAT "DOOM" NEXT MONTH; RIGHT NOW, WE SHOULD ATTEND TO FAR MORE PRESSING MATTERS, SUCH AS...
DRACUS!
TELL ME WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED, FOOL-- AND BE QUICK ABOUT IT!
LORD KRAGONN-- YOU STARTLED ME.
OUT WITH IT, THEN. I'VE NO PATIENCE FOR DRAMA, MY FRIEND...
I'M AFRAID MY NEWS IS MIXED... SOME GOOD, SOME BAD.
I'D ADVISE YOU NOT TO WASTE ANY MORE OF MY TIME THAN YOU HAVE.
OR HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN-- KRAGONN IS HIGH LORD THIS KLARN-CYCLE.
HOW COULD I FORGET, LORD KRAGONN? YOUR LORDSHIP IS A LIGHT IN THIS DARKEST OF TIMES.
AS TO MY NEWS-- MILORD, YOU MUST PREPARE YOURSELF.
IT APPEARS THERE ARE-- OTHERS.
"OTHERS?"

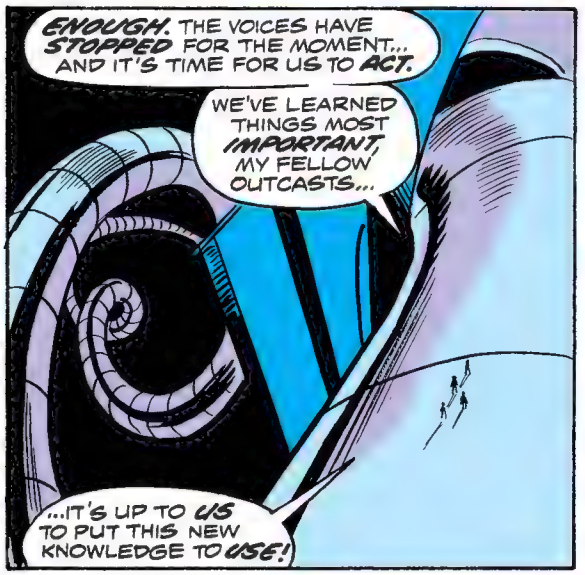
AT THAT MOMENT, IN THE CAPSULE...
AVALON, THOU MUST TELL ME ALL THAT THOU KNOWEST OF THY MASTERS.
METHINKS OUR FATES MAY DEPEND ON THY KNOWLEDGE.
THEN OUR STRUGGLE IS WITHOUT HOPE, THOR--
--FOR MY KNOWLEDGE IS NEXT TO NOTHING.
I ONLY KNOW THAT THIS WORLD DOMINATES ALL FIVE OF THE BLACK STARS--AND THAT WE ARE ITS SLAVES. MORE THAN THIS, I CAN'T SAY.
BUT THOU MUST. WITHOUT THIS CAPSULE LIES DEATH...
...AND IF WE ARE TO SURVIVE, AND FIND TRIUMPH IN THAT SURVIVAL, WE MUST KNOW THE REASON FOR THAT THREAT OF DEATH...
...AND YEA, WE MUST KNOW THE MINDS OF THE BEINGS WHO THREATEN US WITH THAT DEATH!
BROTHER OUTCASTS, THE ASGARDIAN SPEAKS THE TRUTH... BUT HE'S HELPLESS TO DISCOVER WHAT HE NEEDS.
WE, HOWEVER, ARE NOT SO HELPLESS...
...FOR, AS MUTANT OUTCASTS AMONG THE RIGELLIAN COLONIZERS, WE LEARNED THE SKILLS NECESSARY FOR SUBTERFUGE, SKILLS NEITHER THOR NOR AVALON POSSESS...
...AND CAN NEVER UNDERSTAND.
SO, FROM THIS POSITION, WE CAN LISTEN TO THE GIANTS...
NOT A NOBLE OCCUPATION...
...BUT CERTAINLY A PRACTICAL ONE.

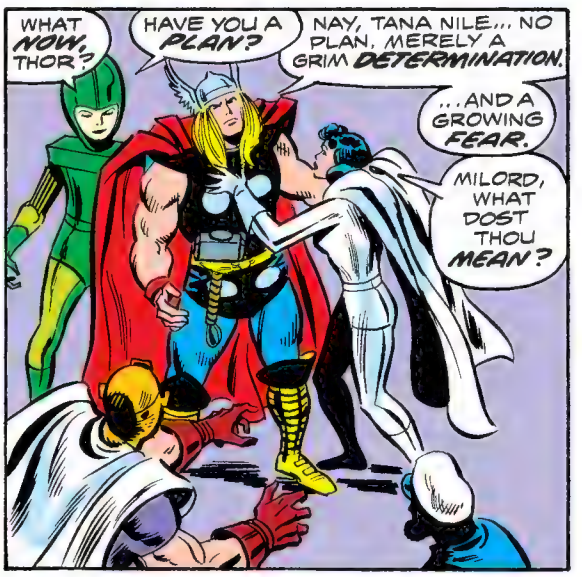

DRACUS, YOU'RE MAD. THESE "OTHERS," AS YOU CALL THEM...
...DO YOU TRULY BELIEVE THEY COME FROM ONE OF OUR BROTHER PLANETS?


"WHERE ELSE, LORD KRAGONN? ARE NOT THE FIVE PLANETS OF THE BLACK STARS THE ONLY INHABITED BODIES IN THIS UNIVERSE?
"IF OTHER CREATURES EXIST--IT FOLLOWS THEY CAN ONLY EXIST ON ONE OF THE OTHER FOUR WORLDS.
"TO THINK OTHERWISE, MILORD--THAT IS THE TRUE INSANITY."

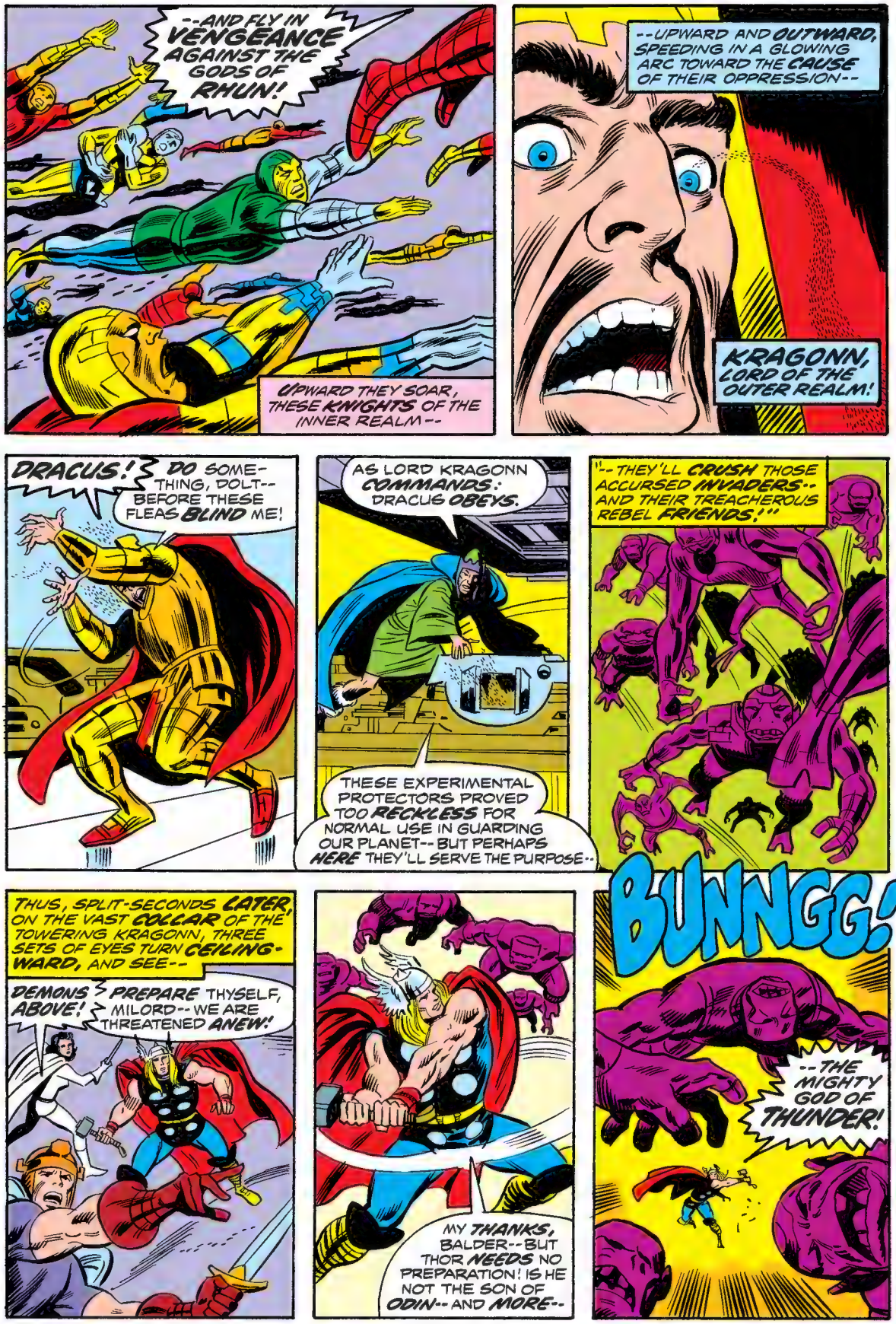

THEN WHAT ARE WE TO DO, DRACUS?
IT'S BEEN TWO THOUSAND KLARNS SINCE LAST WE COMMUNICATED WITH OUR BROTHER PLANETS--
--WE SEND THEM POWER FROM THE PLANETOIDS WE CONSUME FOR FUEL--
--BUT CAN WE HONESTLY KNOW--

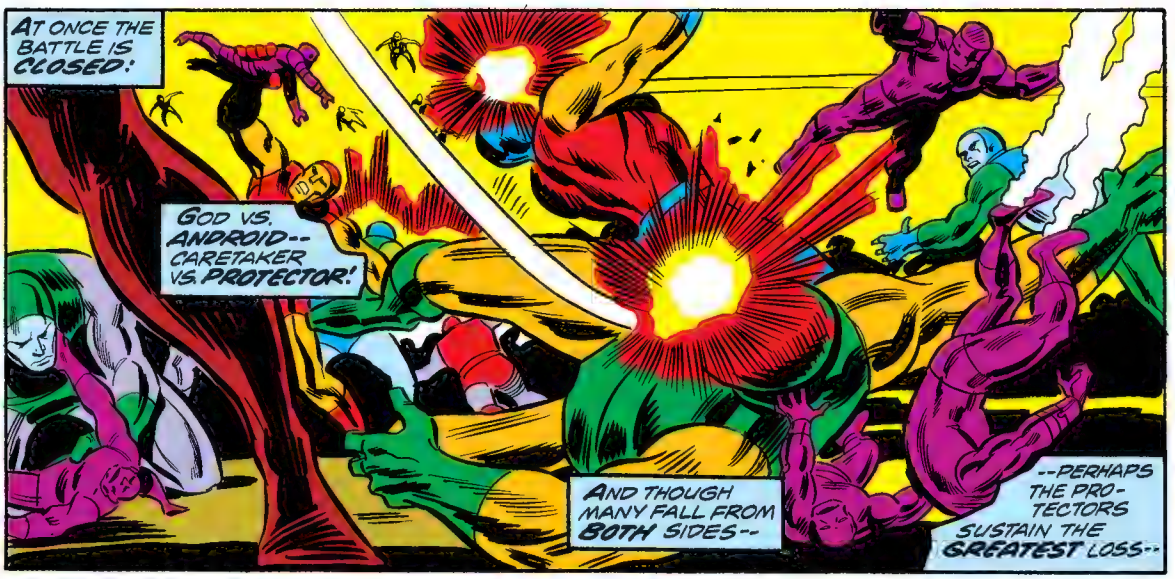
"ARE THEY FRIEND OR FOE?
THE SOUND-- SO INCREDIBLY LOUD!
IT SCREAMS-- SO MUCH PAIN!


ENOUGH. THE VOICES HAVE STOPPED FOR THE MOMENT... AND IT'S TIME FOR US TO ACT.
WE'VE LEARNED THINGS MOST IMPORTANT, MY FELLOW OUTCASTS...
...IT'S UP TO US TO PUT THIS NEW KNOWLEDGE TO USE!


WHAT NOW, THOR?
HAVE YOU A PLAN?
NAY, TANA NILE... NO PLAN, MERELY A GRIM DETERMINATION.
...AND A GROWING FEAR.
MILORD, WHAT DOST THOU MEAN?

PERHAPS YOU'RE RIGHT, DRACUS... THEY SEEM HUMAN ENOUGH...
...SMALLER THAN OUR OWN CARETAKERS, BUT CLOSE TO THEIR IMAGE...
...AND DEFINATELY NOT FROM THE PLANET RHUN!
ARE THEY THE VANGUARD OF OF SOME PLANNED INVASION? IS THAT WHAT YOU BELIEVE?
UNDOUBTEDLY, LORD KRAGONN,
I SWEAR TO YOU-- THEY MUST BE ELIMIN-ATED AT ONCE!
AND WHEN THEIR MASTERS SEEK REVENGE--
--I'LL SAY IT WAS BY YOUR HAND THESE PUPPETS DIED!
AT ONCE, LORD KRAGONN!
VERY WELL, DRACUS. DO WHAT YOU MUST.
LET THE RADIATION BOMBARD-MENT BEGIN!
THOR--THAT PULSING LIGHT! IT DOTH BURN-- LIKE SOME INVISIBLE FIRE!
MILADY, WE ARE ATTACKED!
QUICKLY-- WE MUST ESCAPE THIS RADIATION--
--LEST IT DESTROY US, BODY AND SOUL!
FREEING HIMSELF FROM HIS LADY'S HAND, THE GOD OF THUNDER DRAWS BACK-- AND WITH A POWER MEN MAY ONLY DREAM OF, HE SWINGS HIS MIGHTY MALLET--
--AND FLIES UPWARD ON ITS LEATHERY STRAP!
SISTERS-- BROTHERS-- HURRY!
WE MUST LEAVE OUR HOME, NO MATTER WHAT THE COST--

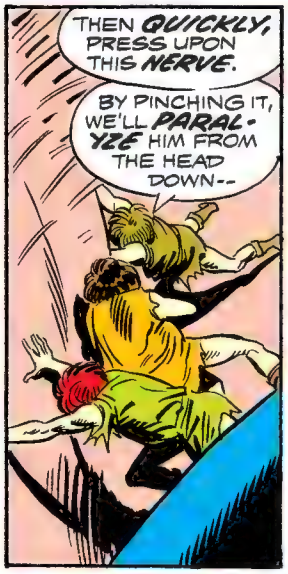

--AND FLY IN VENGEANCE AGAINST THE GODS OF RHUN!
UPWARD THEY SOAR, THESE KNIGHTS OF THE INNER REALM--
--UPWARD AND OUTWARD, SPEEDING IN A GLOWING ARC TOWARD THE CAUSE OF THEIR OPPRESSION--
KRAGONN, LORD OF THE OUTER REALM!
DRACUS! DO SOMETHING, DOLT-- BEFORE THESE FLEAS BLIND ME!
AS LORD KRAGONN COMMANDS: DRACUS OBEYS.
THESE EXPERIMENTAL PROTECTORS PROVED TOO RECKLESS FOR NORMAL USE IN GUARDING OUR PLANET-- BUT PERHAPS HERE THEY'LL SERVE THE PURPOSE--
"--THEY'LL CRUSH THOSE ACCURSED INVADERS-- AND THEIR TREACHEROUS REBEL FRIENDS!"
THUS, SPLIT-SECONDS LATER, ON THE VAST COLLAR OF THE TOWERING KRAGONN, THREE SETS OF EYES TURN CEILINGWARD, AND SEE--
DEMONS ABOVE! PREPARE THYSELF, MILORD-- WE ARE THREATENED ANEW!
MY THANKS, BALDER-- BUT THOR NEEDS NO PREPARATION! IS HE NOT THE SON OF ODIN-- AND MORE--
BUNNGG!
--THE MIGHTY GOD OF THUNDER!


AT ONCE THE BATTLE IS CLOSED:
GOD VS. ANDROID-- CARETAKER VS. PROTECTOR!
AND THOUGH MANY FALL FROM BOTH SIDES--
--PERHAPS THE PRO-TECTORS SUSTAIN THE GREATEST LOSS--

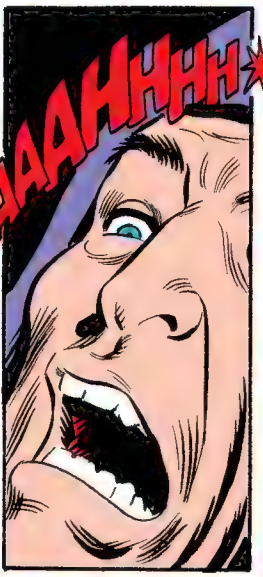
--THOUGH ODDLY, THIS FACT HARDLY MATTERS!
A FEW MORE MOMENTS-- AND THEN, THE END.
MY FOOT UPON THEM-- AND THEY DIE, ALL OF THEM--

--AND IN THE WAR THAT WILL SURELY FOLLOW, DRACUS WILL BE MADE SUPREME!

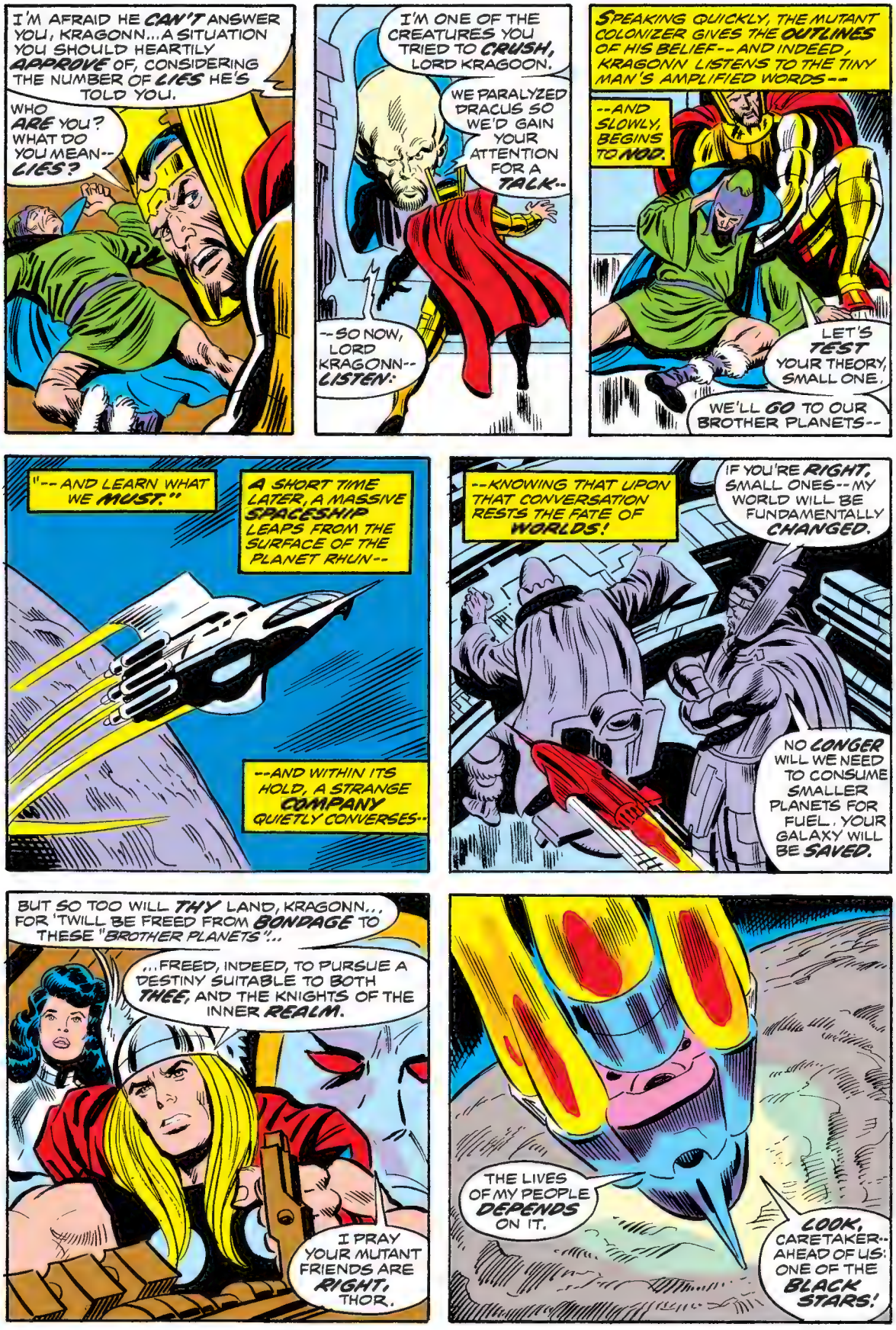
UP AHEAD... THAT'S HIS NECK.
IF WE'RE TO ACT, IT MUST BE NOW!

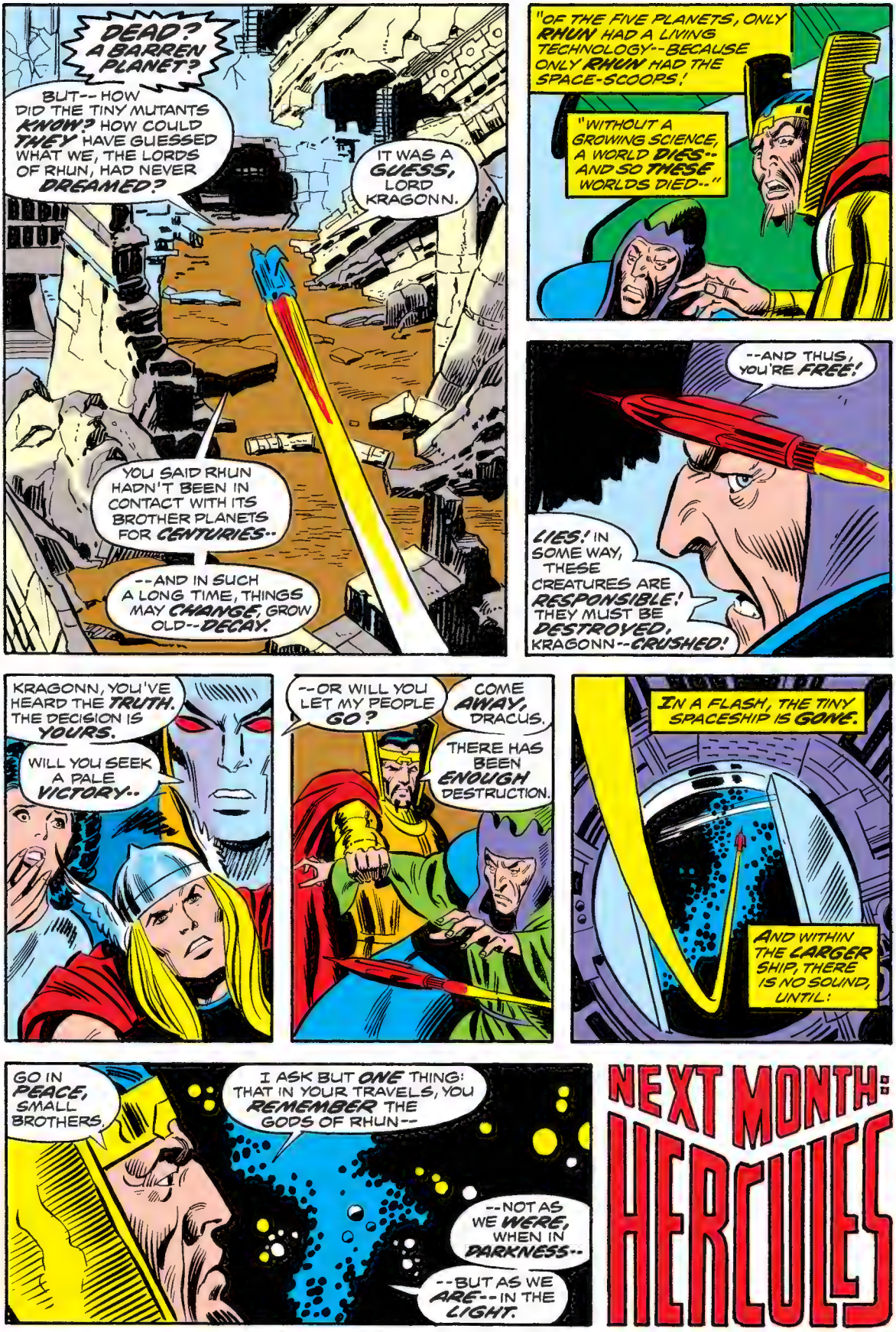

THEN QUICKLY, PRESS UPON THIS NERVE.
BY PINCHING IT, WE'LL PARAL-YZE HIM FROM THE HEAD DOWN--

--AND WE'LL SEE WHAT FINE PLANS THIS MAN HAS WHEN HE CAN NEITHER TALK NOR MOVE!
URRRK


AAAHHHH

DRACUS, YOU IMBECILE-- WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
ANSWER ME, YOU IDIOT!


I'M AFRAID HE CAN'T ANSWER YOU, KRAGONN...A SITUATION YOU SHOULD HEARTILY APPROVE OF, CONSIDERING THE NUMBER OF LIES HE'S TOLD YOU.
WHO ARE YOU? WHAT DO YOU MEAN-- LIES?
I'M ONE OF THE CREATURES YOU TRIED TO CRUSH, LORD KRAGOON.
WE PARALYZED DRACUS SO WE'D GAIN YOUR ATTENTION FOR A TALK--
--SO NOW, LORD KRAGONN-- LISTEN:
SPEAKING QUICKLY, THE MUTANT COLONIZER GIVES THE OUTLINES OF HIS BELIEF--AND INDEED, KRAGONN LISTENS TO THE TINY MAN'S AMPLIFIED WORDS--
--AND SLOWLY, BEGINS TO NOD.
LET'S TEST YOUR THEORY, SMALL ONE.
WE'LL GO TO OUR BROTHER PLANETS--
"--AND LEARN WHAT WE MUST."
A SHORT TIME LATER, A MASSIVE SPACESHIP LEAPS FROM THE SURFACE OF THE PLANET RHUN--
--AND WITHIN ITS HOLD, A STRANGE COMPANY QUIETLY CONVERSES--
--KNOWING THAT UPON THAT CONVERSATION RESTS THE FATE OF WORLDS!
IF YOU'RE RIGHT, SMALL ONES--MY WORLD WILL BE FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGED.
NO LONGER WILL WE NEED TO CONSUME SMALLER PLANETS FOR FUEL, YOUR GALAXY WILL BE SAVED.
BUT SO TOO WILL THY LAND, KRAGONN... FOR 'TWILL BE FREED FROM BONDAGE TO THESE "BROTHER PLANETS"...
...FREED, INDEED, TO PURSUE A DESTINY SUITABLE TO BOTH THEE, AND THE KNIGHTS OF THE INNER REALM.
I PRAY YOUR MUTANT FRIENDS ARE RIGHT, THOR.
THE LIVES OF MY PEOPLE DEPENDS ON IT.
LOOK, CARETAKER-- AHEAD OF US: ONE OF THE BLACK STARS!


DEAD? A BARREN PLANET?
BUT-- HOW DID THE TINY MUTANTS KNOW? HOW COULD THEY HAVE GUESSED WHAT WE, THE LORDS OF RHUN, HAD NEVER DREAMED?
IT WAS A GUESS, LORD KRAGONN.
YOU SAID RHUN HADN'T BEEN IN CONTACT WITH ITS BROTHER PLANETS FOR CENTURIES--
--AND IN SUCH A LONG TIME, THINGS MAY CHANGE, GROW OLD--DECAY.
"OF THE FIVE PLANETS, ONLY RHUN HAD A LIVING TECHNOLOGY--BECAUSE ONLY RHUN HAD THE SPACE-SCOOPS!
"WITHOUT A GROWING SCIENCE, A WORLD DIES-- AND SO THESE WORLDS DIED--"
--AND THUS, YOU'RE FREE!
LIES! IN SOME WAY, THESE CREATURES ARE RESPONSIBLE! THEY MUST BE DESTROYED, KRAGONN--CRUSHED!
KRAGONN, YOU'VE HEARD THE TRUTH. THE DECISION IS YOURS.
WILL YOU SEEK A PALE VICTORY--
--OR WILL YOU LET MY PEOPLE GO?
COME AWAY, DRACUS.
THERE HAS BEEN ENOUGH DESTRUCTION.
IN A FLASH, THE TINY SPACESHIP IS GONE.
AND WITHIN THE LARGER SHIP, THERE IS NO SOUND, UNTIL:
GO IN PEACE, SMALL BROTHERS.
I ASK BUT ONE THING: THAT IN YOUR TRAVELS, YOU REMEMBER THE GODS OF RHUN--
--NOT AS WE WERE, WHEN IN DARKNESS--
--BUT AS WE ARE--IN THE LIGHT.
NEXT MONTH: HERCULES

THOR
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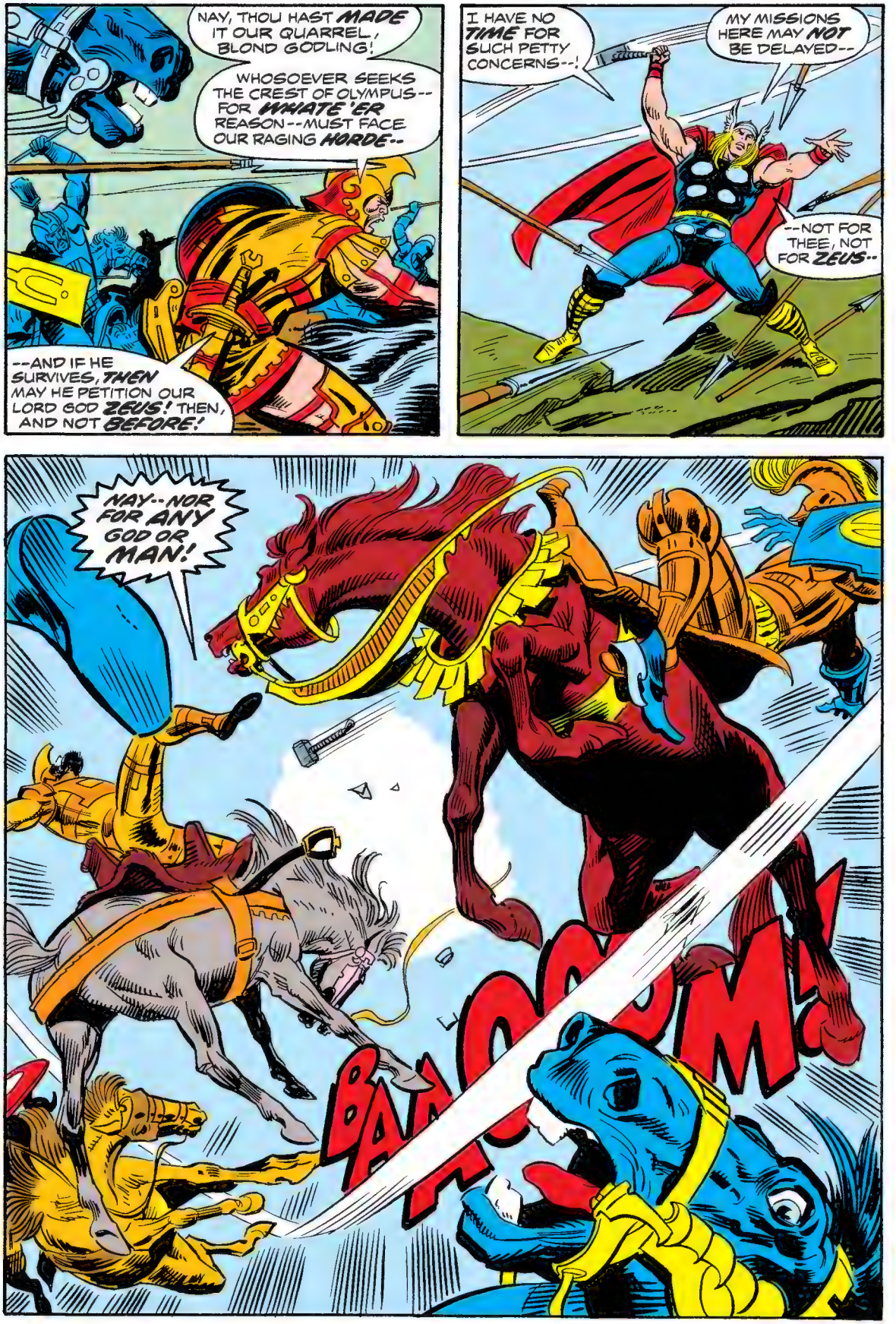
THE MIGHTY
THOR
THOU HAST DARED TO CHALLENGE HERCULES--
--AND SO, MUST DIE!

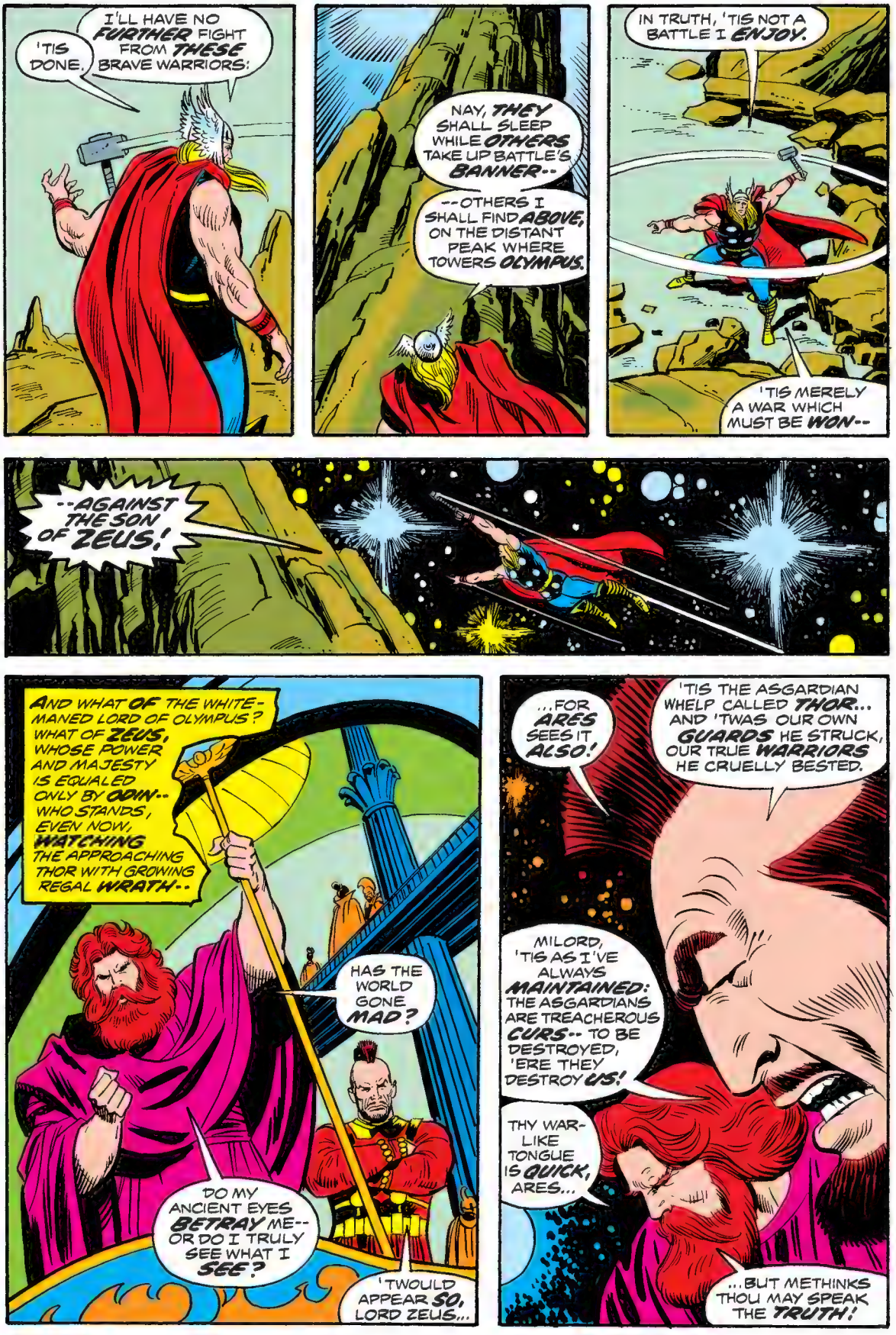
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE MIGHTY THOR! ™

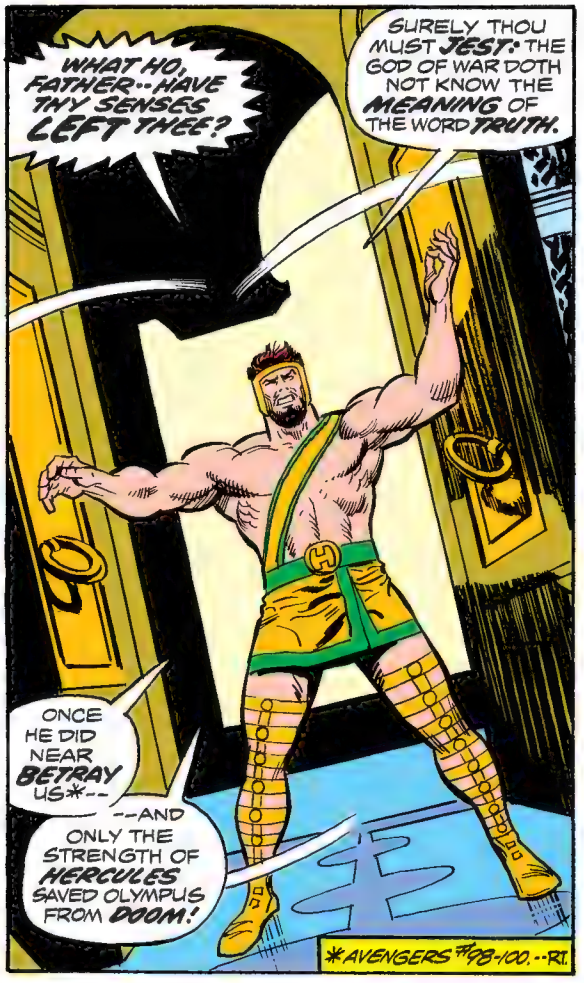
GERRY CONWAY, SCRIPTER / JOHN BUSCEMA, ARTIST / MIKE ESPOSITO, INKER / JOHN COSTANZA, letterer / G. ROUSSOS, colorist / ROY THOMAS, EDITOR

HERCULES ENRAGED!
FEATURING THE MIND-STAGGERING GRANDEUR OF OLYMPUS!
WHAT'S THIS? THE GOD OF THUNDER BATTLING THE OUTLAND GUARDS OF OLYMPUS? FEAR NOT, FAITHFUL ONE: ALL WILL BE EXPLAINED--THOUGH PERHAPS NOT IMMEDIATELY--!
FALL, YE MINIONS OF TREACHEROUS ZEUS!
THOU DOST DARE STRIKE THOR--SON OF ODIN--GOD OF THUNDER?

CALL THYSELF WHAT THOU WILT, BLONDHAIR: ABOVE ALL, THOU ART AN INTRUDER IN THE LAND OF OLYMPUS--
--AND FOR THAT CRIME, THOU MUST PAY THE PENALTY:
THOU MUST DIE!
BROTHERS, AWAKE--THE RIDERS COME!
THEY'LL MAKE THIS BATTLE SHORT--YEA, SWIFT!
THE BLONDHAIR WILL DIE A DEATH MOST BLOODY!
NEVER! 'TIS NOT FOR THEE TO PRONOUNCE THAT FINAL JUDGEMENT--
--NOR 'TIS IT TRULY FOR THOR--
WHAM!
--THOUGH VERILY, IT FITS HIM BETTER THAN IT DOES THEE!
EEEEEEEEEEEEEE
AH, 'TWOULD APPEAR THOU DOST LEARN TOO SLOWLY.
AGAIN I SAY, MY QUARREL IS NOT WITH THEE--
--BUT WITH THE GOD CALLED HERCULES!

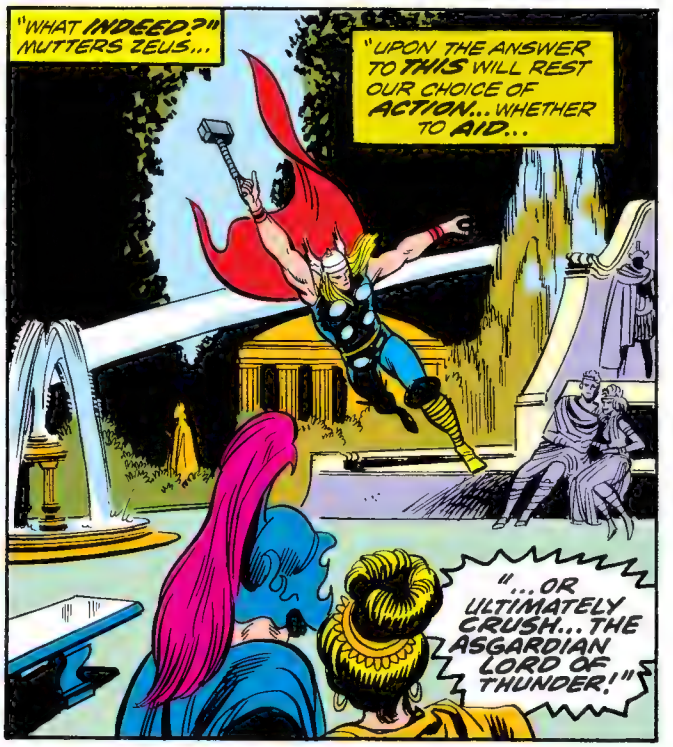

NAY, THOU HAST MADE IT OUR QUARREL, BLOND GODLING!
WHOSOEVER SEEKS THE CREST OF OLYMPUS--FOR WHATE'ER REASON--MUST FACE OUR RAGING HORDE--
--AND IF HE SURVIVES, THEN MAY HE PETITION OUR LORD GOD ZEUS! THEN, AND NOT BEFORE!
I HAVE NO TIME FOR SUCH PETTY CONCERNS--!
MY MISSIONS HERE MAY NOT BE DELAYED--
--NOT FOR THEE, NOT FOR ZEUS--
NAY--NOR FOR ANY GOD OR MAN!
BA-

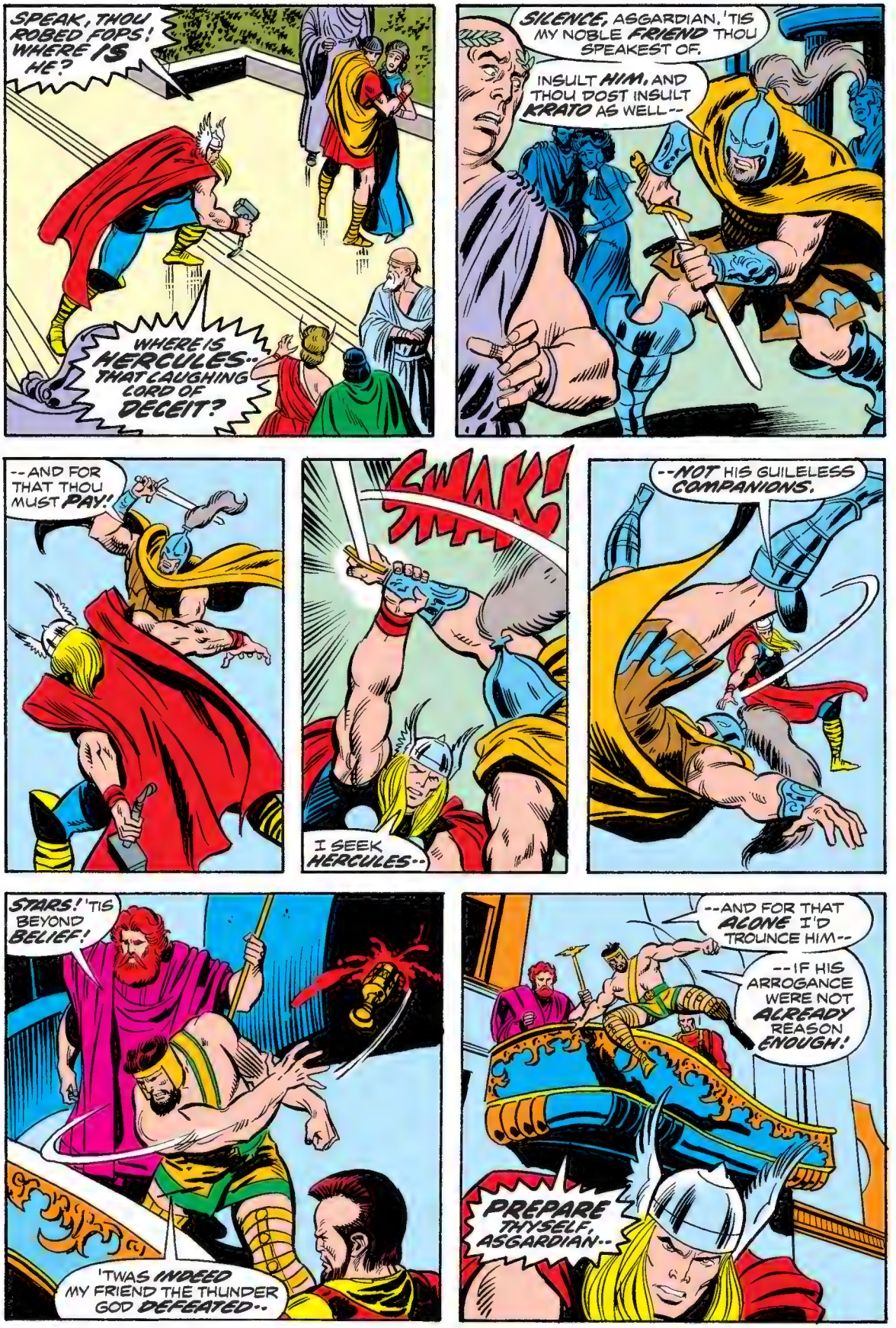

'TIS DONE.
I'LL HAVE NO FURTHER FIGHT FROM THESE BRAVE WARRIORS.
NAY, THEY SHALL SLEEP WHILE OTHERS TAKE UP BATTLE'S BANNER--
--OTHERS I SHALL FIND ABOVE, ON THE DISTANT PEAK WHERE TOWERS OLYMPUS.
IN TRUTH, 'TIS NOT A BATTLE I ENJOY.
'TIS MERELY A WAR WHICH MUST BE WON--
--AGAINST THE SON OF ZEUS!
AND WHAT OF THE WHITE-MANED LORD OF OLYMPUS? WHAT OF ZEUS, WHOSE POWER AND MAJESTY IS EQUALED ONLY BY ODIN-- WHO STANDS, EVEN NOW, WATCHING THE APPROACHING THOR WITH GROWING REGAL WRATH--
HAS THE WORLD GONE MAD?
DO MY ANCIENT EYES BETRAY ME-- OR DO I TRULY SEE WHAT I SEE?
'TWOULD APPEAR SO, LORD ZEUS...
...FOR ARES SEES IT ALSO!
'TIS THE ASGARDIAN WHELP CALLED THOR... AND 'TWAS OUR OWN GUARDS HE STRUCK, OUR TRUE WARRIORS HE CRUELLY BESTED.
MILORD, 'TIS AS I'VE ALWAYS MAINTAINED: THE ASGARDIANS ARE TREACHEROUS CURS-- TO BE DESTROYED, 'ERE THEY DESTROY US!
THY WAR-LIKE TONGUE IS QUICK, ARES...
...BUT METHINKS THOU MAY SPEAK THE TRUTH!


WHAT HO, FATHER--HAVE THY SENSES LEFT THEE?
SURELY THOU MUST JEST: THE GOD OF WAR DOTH NOT KNOW THE MEANING OF THE WORD TRUTH.
ONCE HE DID NEAR BETRAY US*--
--AND ONLY THE STRENGTH OF HERCULES SAVED OLYMPUS FROM DOOM!
*AVENGERS #98-100.--RT.

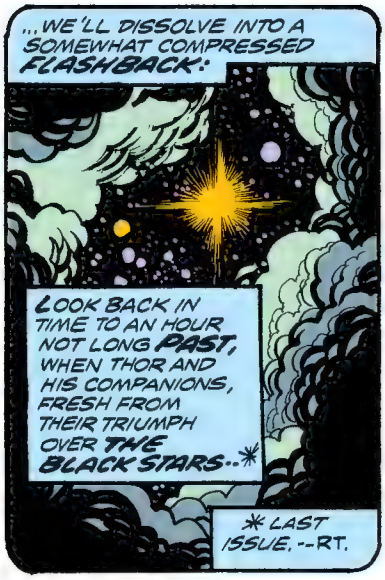
MINE IS NOT THE ONLY QUICK TONGUE, ZEUS..., THE TONGUE OF THY SON IS EQUALLY BITTER.
HERCULES FORGETS-- I HAVE DONE PENANCE FOR MY PAST SINS, AND STAND IN FAVOR ONCE MORE WITH HIS FATHER'S COURT.
A FACT HE HAS NEVER APPROVED.
QUITE TRUE, WAR-GOD.
A SNAKE MAY SHED ITS SKIN-- BUT ITS FANGS REMAIN.

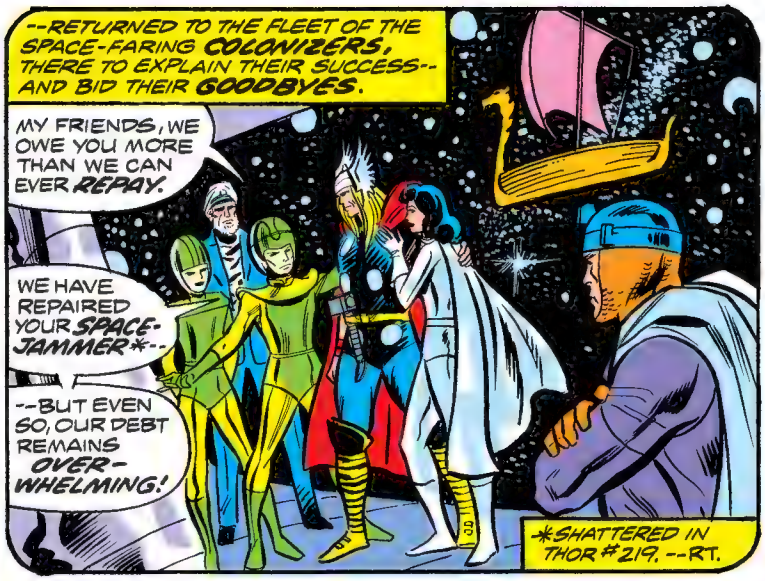
ENOUGH. THERE IS A MATTER FAR MORE GRAVE FOR THEE TO ATTEND, HERCULES, THAN THE QUESTION OF ARES' LOYALTY.
LOOK THEE BEYOND... AND TELL ME WHAT THOU DOST SEE.
BY MY SOUL... 'TIS THOR!
WHAT BRINGS HIM HERE, I WONDER?

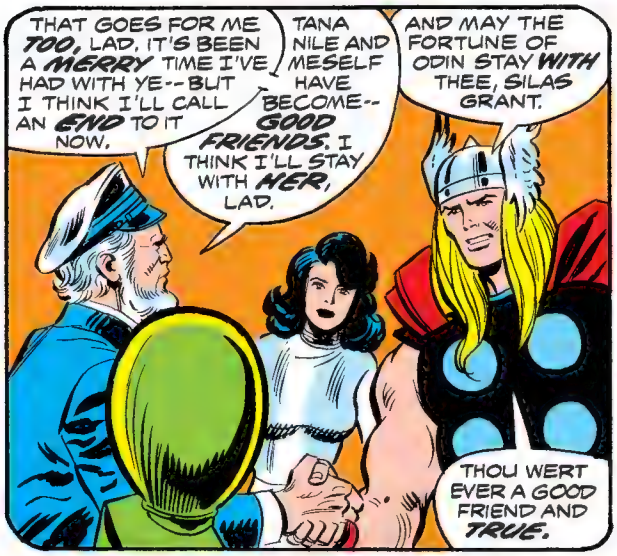

"WHAT INDEED?" MUTTERS ZEUS...
"UPON THE ANSWER TO THIS WILL REST OUR CHOICE OF ACTION... WHETHER TO AID...
"... OR ULTIMATELY CRUSH... THE ASGARDIAN LORD OF THUNDER!"

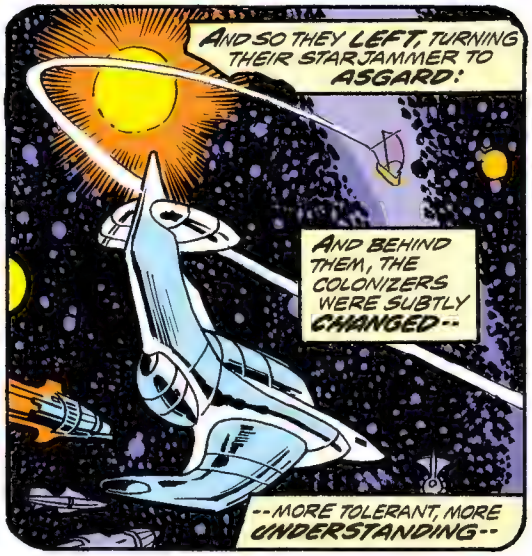

SPEAK, THOU ROBED FOPS! WHERE IS HE?
WHERE IS HERCULES-- THAT LAUGHING LORD OF DECEIT?
SILENCE, ASGARDIAN, 'TIS MY NOBLE FRIEND THOU SPEAKEST OF.
INSULT HIM, AND THOU DOST INSULT KRATO AS WELL--
--AND FOR THAT THOU MUST PAY!
SWAK!
I SEEK HERCULES--
--NOT HIS GUILELESS COMPANIONS.
STARS! 'TIS BEYOND BELIEF!
'TWAS INDEED MY FRIEND THE THUNDER GOD DEFEATED--
--AND FOR THAT ALONE I'D TROUNCE HIM--
--IF HIS ARROGANCE WERE NOT ALREADY REASON ENOUGH!
PREPARE THYSELF, ASGARDIAN--

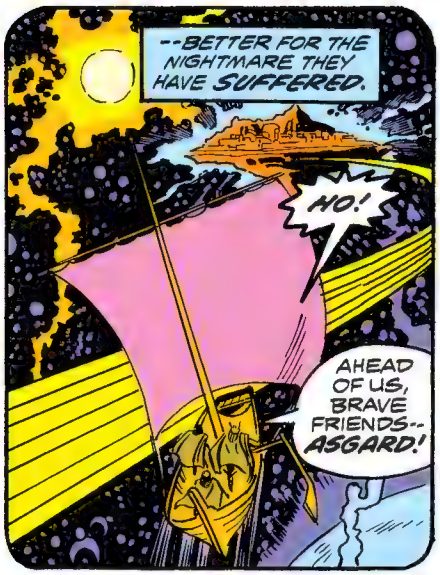
--FOR DOOM IS UPON THEE!
WHAM
WELL, GOLDEN ONE? WILT THOU SIT THERE ALL DAY?
HAS THY STOMACH FOR BATTLE FLED THEE-- NOW THAT THOU DOST FACE THE STRONGEST GOD OF ALL?
THY EGO IS EXCEEDED ONLY BY THY FAITHLESS-NESS, HERCULES!
'TIS TIME BOTH WERE GIVEN THEIR DUE!
THEN DO SO, ASGARDIAN-- IF THOU CANST!
AND I IN TURN SHALL AIM TO DEFEAT THEE--
--AS THOU DIDST DEFEAT THE BRAVE KRATO!
HAVE AT THEE, TRAITOR--
CRADOOM!
--FOR ODIN, FOR KRISTA-- FOR ASGARD!
OKAY, RELAX. IT'S TIME WE FILLED YOU IN ON WHAT'S HAP-PENED BETWEEN LAST ISSUE AND THIS, SO IF YOU'LL KINDLY TURN TO THE 3RD PAGE FOLLOWING...

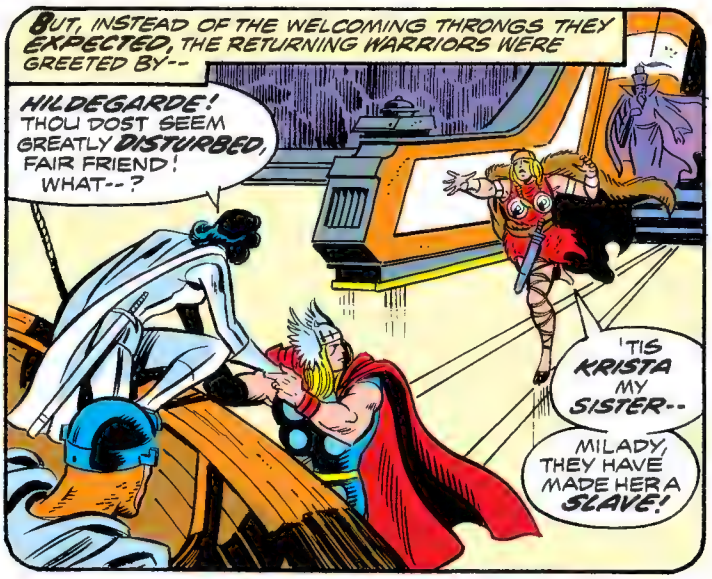

...WE'LL DISSOLVE INTO A SOMEWHAT COMPRESSED FLASHBACK:
LOOK BACK IN TIME TO AN HOUR NOT LONG PAST, WHEN THOR AND HIS COMPANIONS, FRESH FROM THEIR TRIUMPH OVER THE BLACK STARS--*
* LAST ISSUE. --RT.


--RETURNED TO THE FLEET OF THE SPACE-FARING COLONIZERS, THERE TO EXPLAIN THEIR SUCCESS-- AND BID THEIR GOODBYES.
MY FRIENDS, WE OWE YOU MORE THAN WE CAN EVER REPAY.
WE HAVE REPAIRED YOUR SPACE-JAMMER*--
--BUT EVEN SO, OUR DEBT REMAINS OVER-WHELMING!
*SHATTERED IN THOR #219. --RT.


THAT GOES FOR ME TOO, LAD, IT'S BEEN A MERRY TIME I'VE HAD WITH YE--BUT I THINK I'LL CALL AN END TO IT NOW.
TANA NILE AND MESELF HAVE BECOME-- GOOD FRIENDS. I THINK I'LL STAY WITH HER, LAD.
AND MAY THE FORTUNE OF ODIN STAY WITH THEE, SILAS GRANT.
THOU WERT EVER A GOOD FRIEND AND TRUE.


AND SO THEY LEFT, TURNING THEIR STAR JAMMER TO ASGARD:
AND BEHIND THEM, THE COLONIZERS WERE SUBTLY CHANGED--
--MORE TOLERANT, MORE UNDERSTANDING--


--BETTER FOR THE NIGHTMARE THEY HAVE SUFFERED.
HO!
AHEAD OF US, BRAVE FRIENDS-- ASGARD!


BUT, INSTEAD OF THE WELCOMING THRONGS THEY EXPECTED, THE RETURNING WARRIORS WERE GREETED BY--
HILDEGARDE! THOU DOST SEEM GREATLY DISTURBED, FAIR FRIEND! WHAT--?
'TIS KRISTA MY SISTER--
MILADY, THEY HAVE MADE HER A SLAVE!

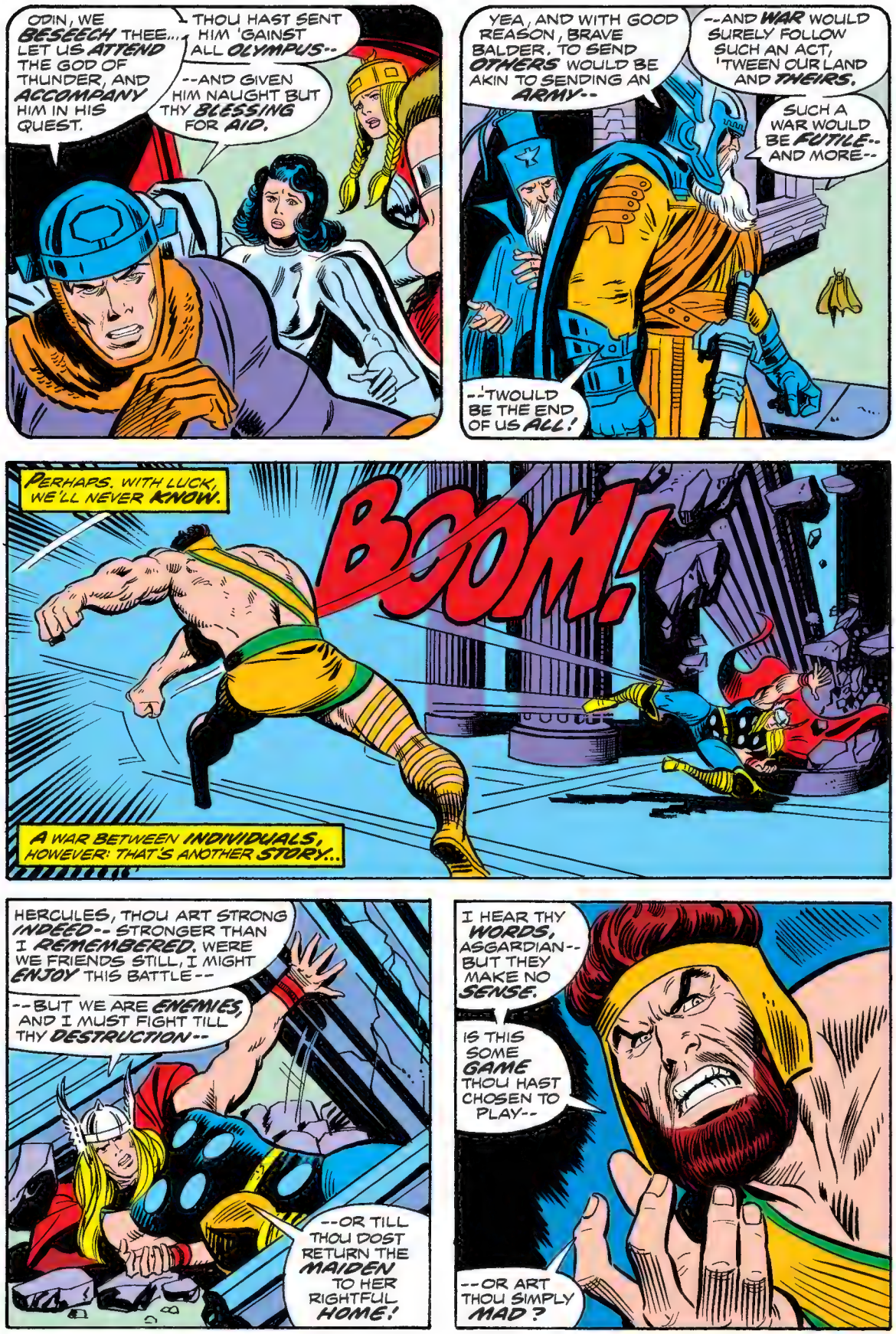
WHO HAS MADE HER A SLAVE, HILDEGARDE? WHAT MONSTER WOULD DO THIS TO THY KIN? SURELY NOT HERE IN ASGARD--?
NAY, NOT ASGARD, MILADY SIF! 'TIS THOSE OTHERS--
THEY WHO DID PRETEND TO BEFRIEND US, BUT WHO HAVE BETRAYED--
HUSH, CHILD! 'TIS NOT FOR THEE TO TELL THIS TALE.
ODIN HAS COMMANDED THAT HE ALONE SHOULD SPEAK ON THIS!
THEN LET US GO TO MY FATHER, VIZIER--
--FOR INDEED, THIS SEEMS A MATTER MOST GRAVE!
AND SO, A SHORT TIME LATER, IN THE CHAMBER OF THE ALL-FATHER HIMSELF...
MILORD, I BESEECH THEE-- TELL US THE MEANING OF HILDEGARDE'S FEARS.
WHAT MENACE DOTH CONFRONT US NOW?
NO MENACE, MY SON... RATHER, 'TIS A GRIM BIT OF TREACHERY WHICH CONCERNS US.
SADLY, THERE ARE NO WORDS BY WHICH I MAY EASE THIS BLOW--
--AND SO, I SHALL NOT MAKE THE ATTEMPT.
LOOK THEE TO THE MYSTIC GLOBE, THOR-- AND SEE WHAT HILDEGARDE AND I BEHELD WHEN WE DID TRY TO TRACE HER VANISHED SISTER. LOOK THEE AT--

--PLUTO, LORD OF THE UNDERWORLD-- AND HERCULES, PRINCE OF OLYMPUS-- SCOUNDRELS TOGETHER IN BREAKING OUR BLESSED PEACE!

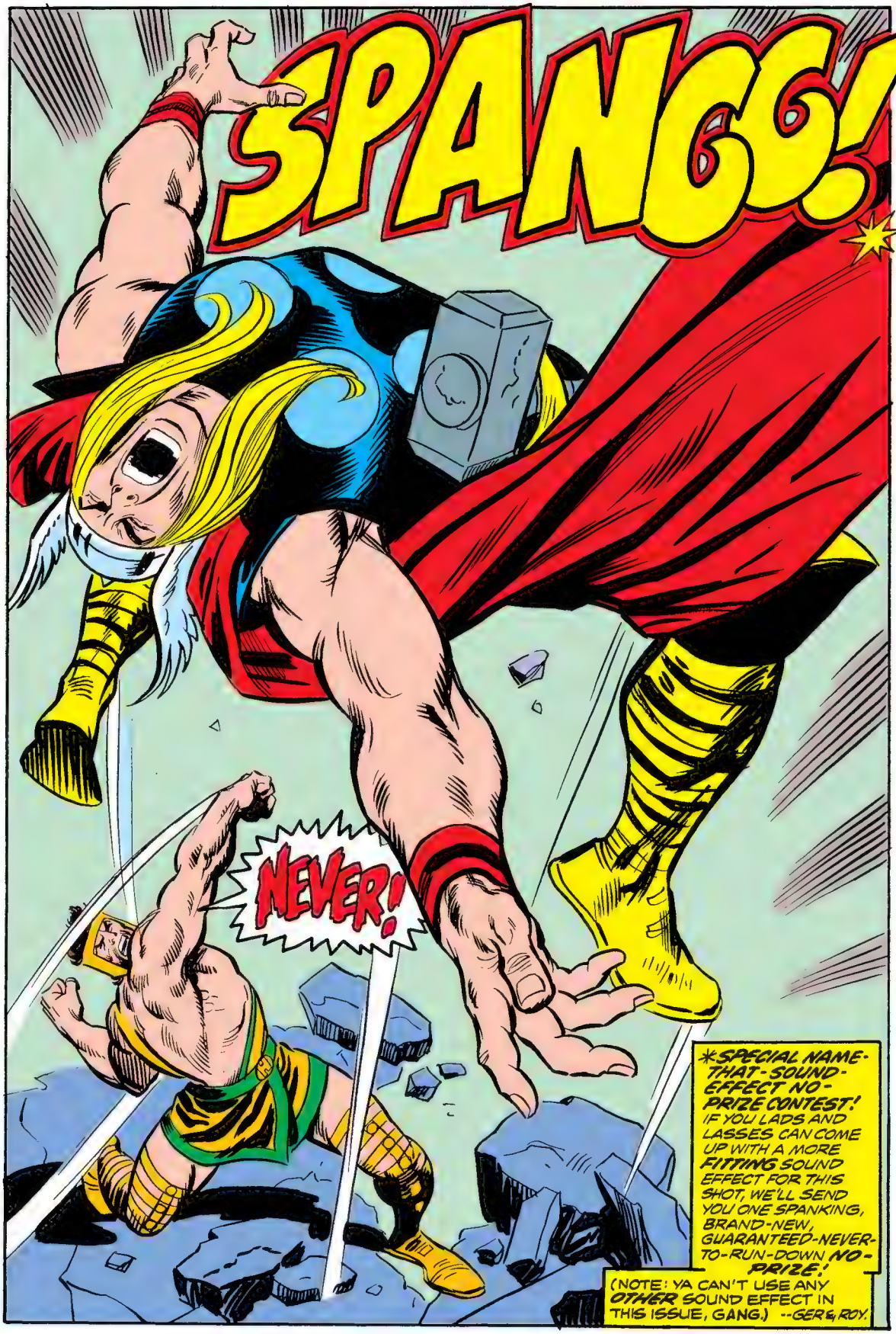
AND THERE AT THEIR *FEET*-- THE YOUNG GODDESS CALLED *KRISTA*, SHE OF THE GOLDEN HAIR, MOST *TREASURED* SISTER OF *HILDEGARDE*--

--CHAINED LIKE SOME COMMON *SLAVE*, DISGRACED BY THEIR BLACKHEARTED *GREED*!

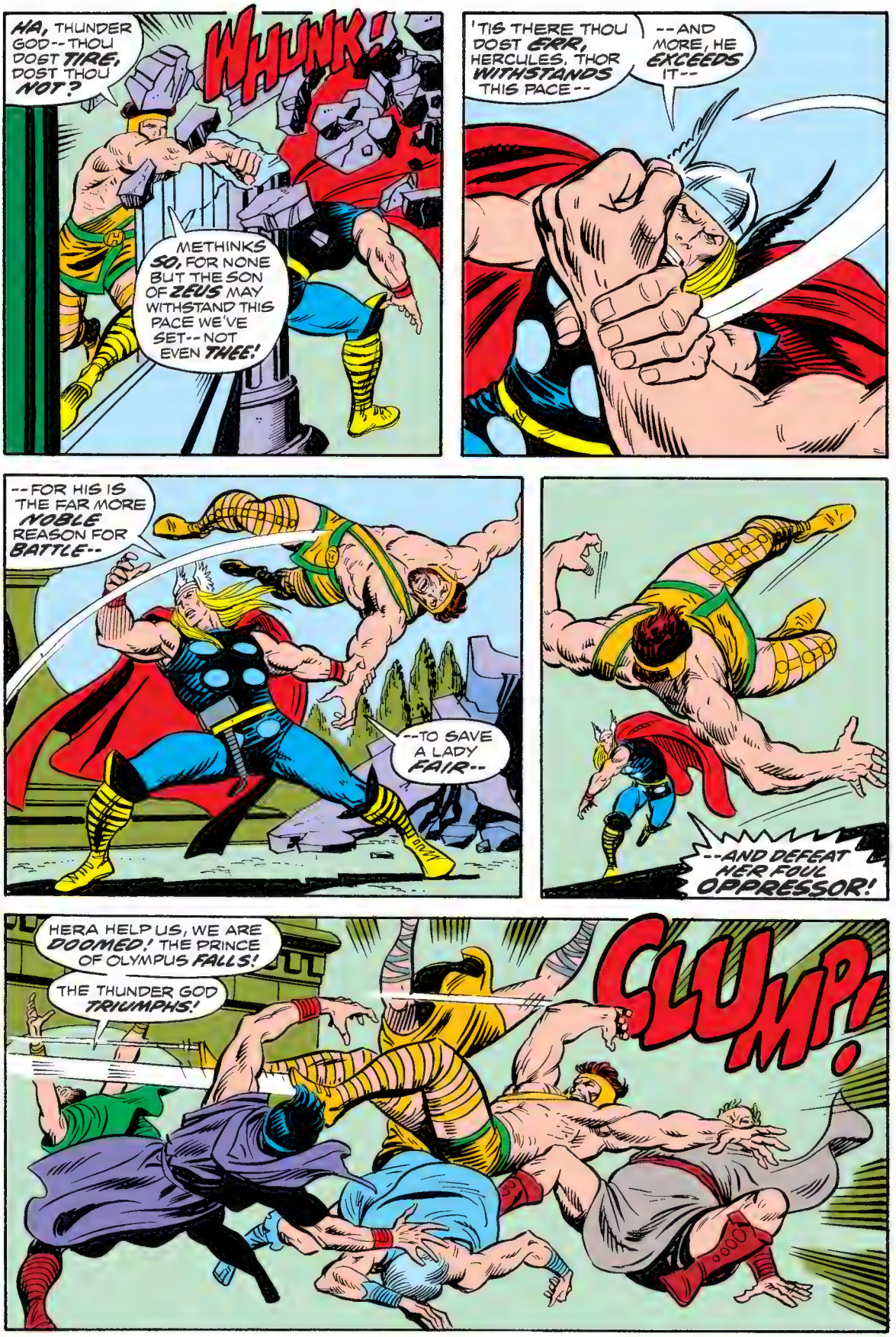
MILORD... HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?
'TWERE SOME GEM INVOLVED, MY SON... A CHARMSTONE THE LASS DISCOVERED, WHICH SPIRITED HER AWAY*...
...A CHARM PLANTED BY PLUTO, NO DOUBT...
*THOR #219.--RT.
...DESIGNED TO ENTRAP A MAIDEN OF ASGARD AS NAIVE AS SHE.
BY HEIMDAL'S EYES--THIS TREACHERY WILL NOT GO UNAVENGED!
MILORD, I SAY THEE NAY--
HERCULES IS LIKE A BROTHER TO THEE--THOU MUST NOT TURN SO QUICKLY AGAINST HIM!
MILADY, THE REASON IS PLAIN.
'TIS BETRAYAL MOST FOUL!
MAYBE THERE IS SOME EXPLANATION-- SOME AS YET UNKNOWN REASON FOR THIS DEED--!
SO THEN, MY SON... WHAT IS THY DECISION?
BY THY LEAVE, MILORD... I WOULD TRAVEL TO OLYMPUS, THERE TO DEFEND OUR HONOR...
...THERE TO ARIGHT THIS MOST VICIOUS WRONG!
SO BE IT, THOR, THE QUEST IS THINE.
MAYEST THOU DELIVER THYSELF WITH THE DIGNITY DESERVING OF A GOD.
MY FATHER... I CAN DO NO MORE.

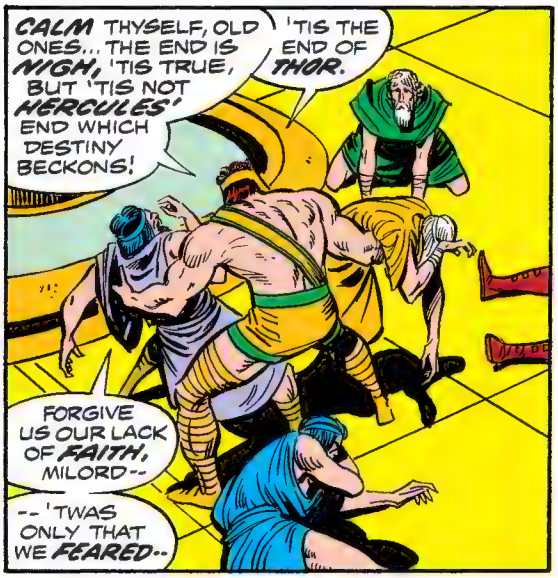

ODIN, WE BESEECH THEE... LET US ATTEND THE GOD OF THUNDER, AND ACCOMPANY HIM IN HIS QUEST.
THOU HAST SENT HIM 'GAINST ALL OLYMPUS--
--AND GIVEN HIM NAUGHT BUT THY BLESSING FOR AID.
YEA, AND WITH GOOD REASON, BRAVE BALDER. TO SEND OTHERS WOULD BE AKIN TO SENDING AN ARMY--
--AND WAR WOULD SURELY FOLLOW SUCH AN ACT, 'TWEEN OUR LAND AND THEIRS.
SUCH A WAR WOULD BE FUTILE-- AND MORE--
--'TWOULD BE THE END OF US ALL!
PERHAPS. WITH LUCK, WE'LL NEVER KNOW.
BOOM!
A WAR BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS, HOWEVER: THAT'S ANOTHER STORY...
HERCULES, THOU ART STRONG INDEED-- STRONGER THAN I REMEMBERED. WERE WE FRIENDS STILL, I MIGHT ENJOY THIS BATTLE--
--BUT WE ARE ENEMIES, AND I MUST FIGHT TILL THY DESTRUCTION--
--OR TILL THOU DOST RETURN THE MAIDEN TO HER RIGHTFUL HOME!
I HEAR THY WORDS, ASGARDIAN-- BUT THEY MAKE NO SENSE.
IS THIS SOME GAME THOU HAST CHOSEN TO PLAY--
--OR ART THOU SIMPLY MAD?

IF ANY IS SENSELESS, 'TIS THOU, BRIGAND!
THOR DOTH RETAIN BOTH MIND AND POWER--
--AND 'TIS HIS POWER HE FLINGS AGAINST THEE--
SO!
THRAKO!
:UNNNNNH!:
NOW, HERCULES... WILT THOU SPEAK?
TELL ME WHERE SHE BE, AND I'LL LEAVE THEE-- IN MEMORY OF THE FRIENDS WHICH ONCE WE WERE!
WE COULD NOT HAVE BEEN CLOSE FRIENDS, THUNDER GOD--OR ELSE THOU WOULD KNOW--
--HERCULES NEVER SURREN-DERS!
NEVER!
FOOM!

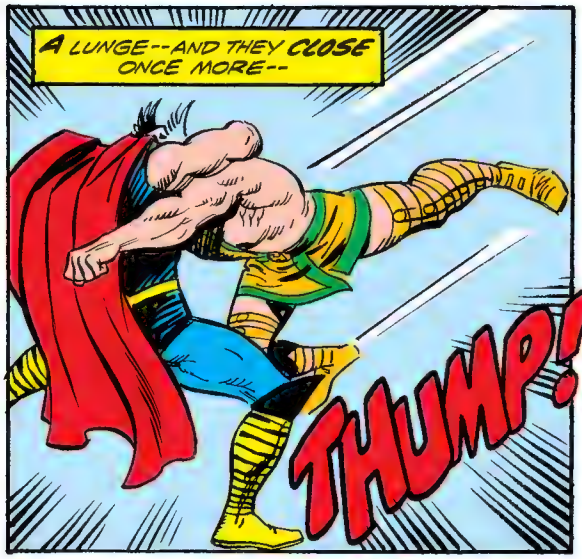

SPANG!
NEVER!
*SPECIAL NAME-THAT-SOUND-EFFECT NO-PRIZE CONTEST! IF YOU LADS AND LASSES CAN COME UP WITH A MORE FITTING SOUND EFFECT FOR THIS SHOT, WE'LL SEND YOU ONE SPANKING, BRAND-NEW, GUARANTEED-NEVER-TO-RUN-DOWN NO-PRIZE!
(NOTE: YA CAN'T USE ANY OTHER SOUND EFFECT IN THIS ISSUE, GANG.) --GER & ROY.

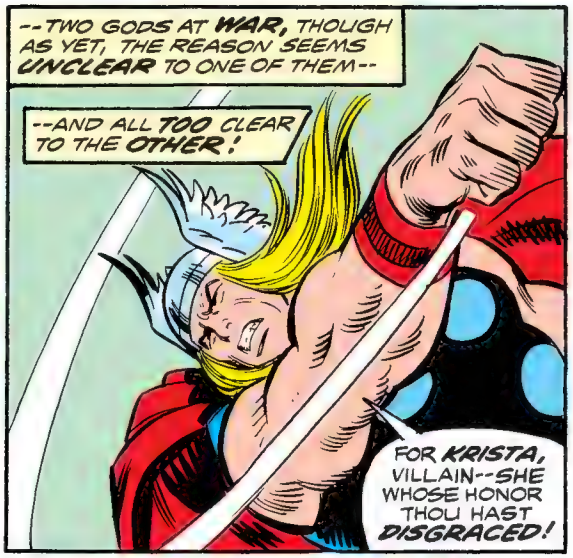
MEANWHILE, AS THE BATTLE RAGES IN THE PALACE GARDEN, CLAIMING THE FULL ATTENTION OF THE GREEK GOD ZEUS, THE GOD OF WAR CALLED ARES MAKES AN UNOBSERVED DEPARTURE.
THESE HALLS ARE DARK, AIRY FROM THE WIND WHICH WHIPS THIS SOLITARY MOUNT...
...YET ARES MOVES THROUGH THEM WITH ASSURANCE, AS THOUGH FAMILIAR WITH THIS LITTLE-USED PATH...
...WHICH INDEED HE IS... MOST FAMILIAR.
SNATOS,.. LITTLE FOOL, WHAT WORD DOST THOU BRING?
IS HE READY?
AYE, MILORD ARES,.. AND WAITING FOR THY SIGNAL.
ALL THE HORDES OF HADES HAVE BEEN SUMMONED... THE UNDERWORLD AWAITS THY CALL!
TELL THY MASTER THE MOMENT DRAWS NEAR.
SOON, THE WAR TO END ALL WARS WILL BEGIN--
--AND WHEN 'TIS DONE, ONLY WE WILL HAVE WON.'
AH, THE SOUND OF BATTLE GROWS MORE STRIDENT. TRULY, 'TIS A JOYOUS SOUND.
'TWILL BE MORE JOYOUS TO HEAR THE DEATH RATTLE OF HERCULES-- AND HEAR IT I SHALL--
--FOR 'TWILL BE BY MY HAND HE DIES--
--THOUGH ALL-- ALL-- WILL BLAME THOR!


HA, THUNDER GOD--THOU DOST TIRE, DOST THOU NOT?
WHUNK!
METHINKS SO, FOR NONE BUT THE SON OF ZEUS MAY WITHSTAND THIS PACE WE'VE SET--NOT EVEN THEE!
'TIS THERE THOU DOST ERR, HERCULES, THOR WITHSTANDS THIS PACE--
--AND MORE, HE EXCEEDS IT--
--FOR HIS IS THE FAR MORE NOBLE REASON FOR BATTLE--
--TO SAVE A LADY FAIR--
--AND DEFEAT HER FOUL OPPRESSOR!
HERA HELP US, WE ARE DOOMED! THE PRINCE OF OLYMPUS FALLS!
THE THUNDER GOD TRIUMPHS!
SLUMP!

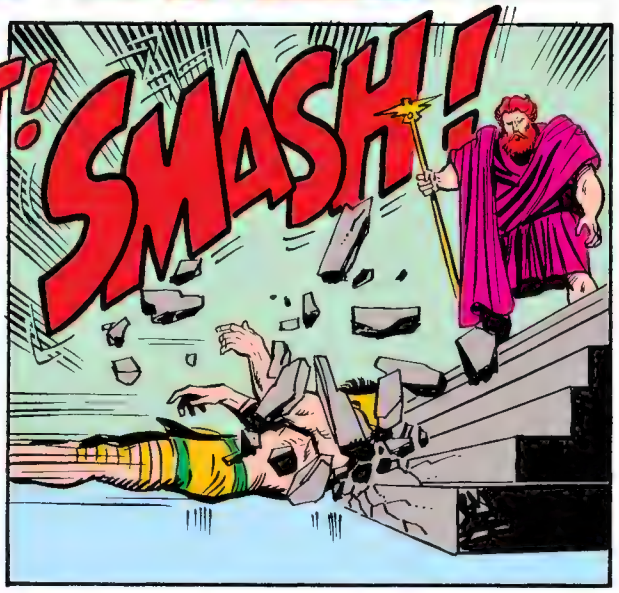

CALM THYSELF, OLD ONES... THE END IS NIGH, 'TIS TRUE, BUT 'TIS NOT HERCULES' END WHICH DESTINY BECKONS!
'TIS THE END OF THOR.
FORGIVE US OUR LACK OF FAITH, MILORD--
--'TWAS ONLY THAT WE FEARED--

ALL GODS FEAR, OLD ONE... 'TIS ONLY A FOOL WHO LIVES WITHOUT IT.
YET EVEN SO, SUCH FEAR MUST E'ER BE THRUST ASIDE--
--AND 'TIS THIS WHICH MARKS THE BRAVE MAN--
--OR SO THE MINSTRELS SING!


A LUNGE--AND THEY CLOSE ONCE MORE--
THUMP!

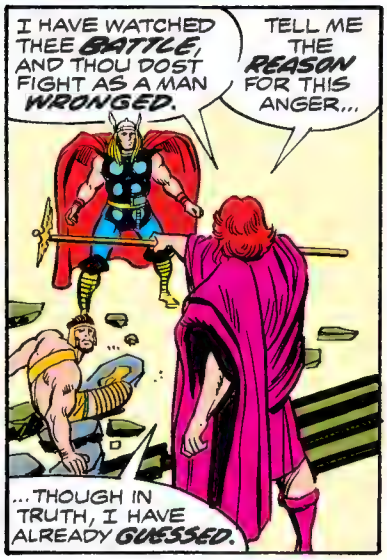

--TWO GODS AT WAR, THOUGH AS YET, THE REASON SEEMS UNCLEAR TO ONE OF THEM--
--AND ALL TOO CLEAR TO THE OTHER!
FOR KRISTA, VILLAIN--SHE WHOSE HONOR THOU HAST DISGRACED!

AND FOR THOR-- WHO SHALL DEFEND THAT HONOR--
--TO THY MOST WORTHY DEATH!
BUNT!

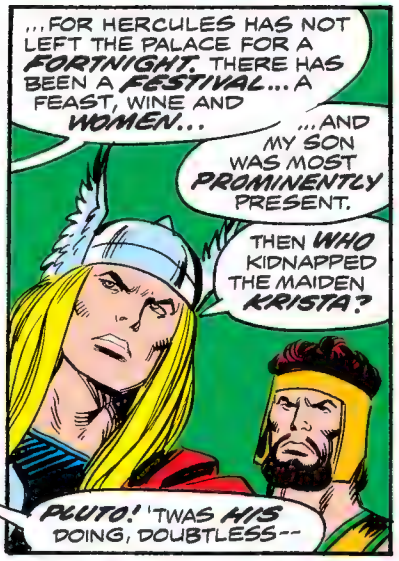

SMASH!

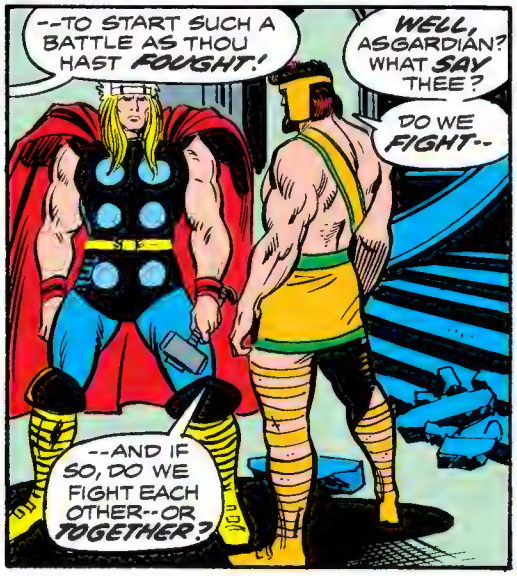
NOW, HERCULES... PREPARE THYSELF.
THE PITS OF THE UNDER-WORLD WITH WHICH THOU ART SO FAMILIAR ...AWAIT THEE!

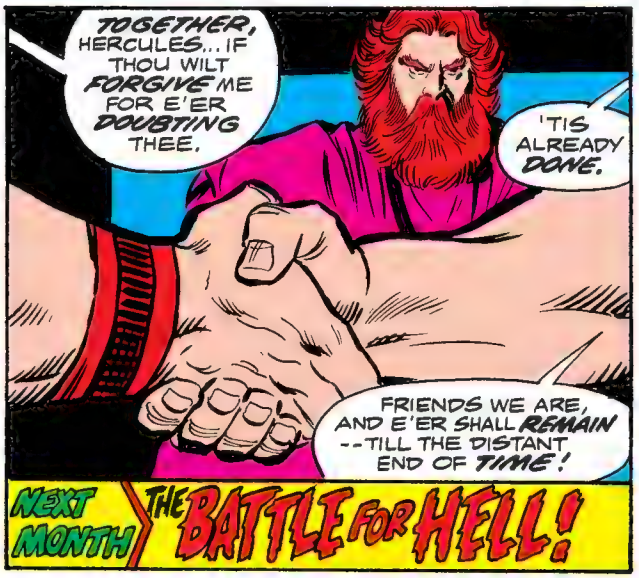
HOLD!
ASGARDIAN, 'TWOULD APPEAR THOU HAST MADE A GRAVE MISTAKE.
HALT... BEFORE THOU DOST MAKE ANOTHER!


I HAVE WATCHED THEE BATTLE, AND THOU DOST FIGHT AS A MAN WRONGED.
TELL ME THE REASON FOR THIS ANGER...
...THOUGH IN TRUTH, I HAVE ALREADY GUESSED.

GRIMLY, THOR EXPLAINS, AND WHEN HE FINISHES...
'TIS AS I EXPECTED. THOR, THOU HAST BEEN DECEIVED..


...FOR HERCULES HAS NOT LEFT THE PALACE FOR A FORTNIGHT. THERE HAS BEEN A FESTIVAL... A FEAST, WINE AND WOMEN...
...AND MY SON WAS MOST PROMINENTLY PRESENT.
THEN WHO KIDNAPPED THE MAIDEN KRISTA?
PLUTO! 'TWAS HIS DOING, DOUBTLESS--


--TO START SUCH A BATTLE AS THOU HAST FOUGHT!
WELL, ASGARDIAN? WHAT SAY THEE?
DO WE FIGHT--
--AND IF SO, DO WE FIGHT EACH OTHER--OR TOGETHER?


TOGETHER, HERCULES... IF THOU WILT FORGIVE ME FOR E'ER DOUBTING THEE.
'TIS ALREADY DONE.
FRIENDS WE ARE, AND E'ER SHALL REMAIN --TILL THE DISTANT END OF TIME!
NEXT MONTH
THE BATTLE FOR HELL!

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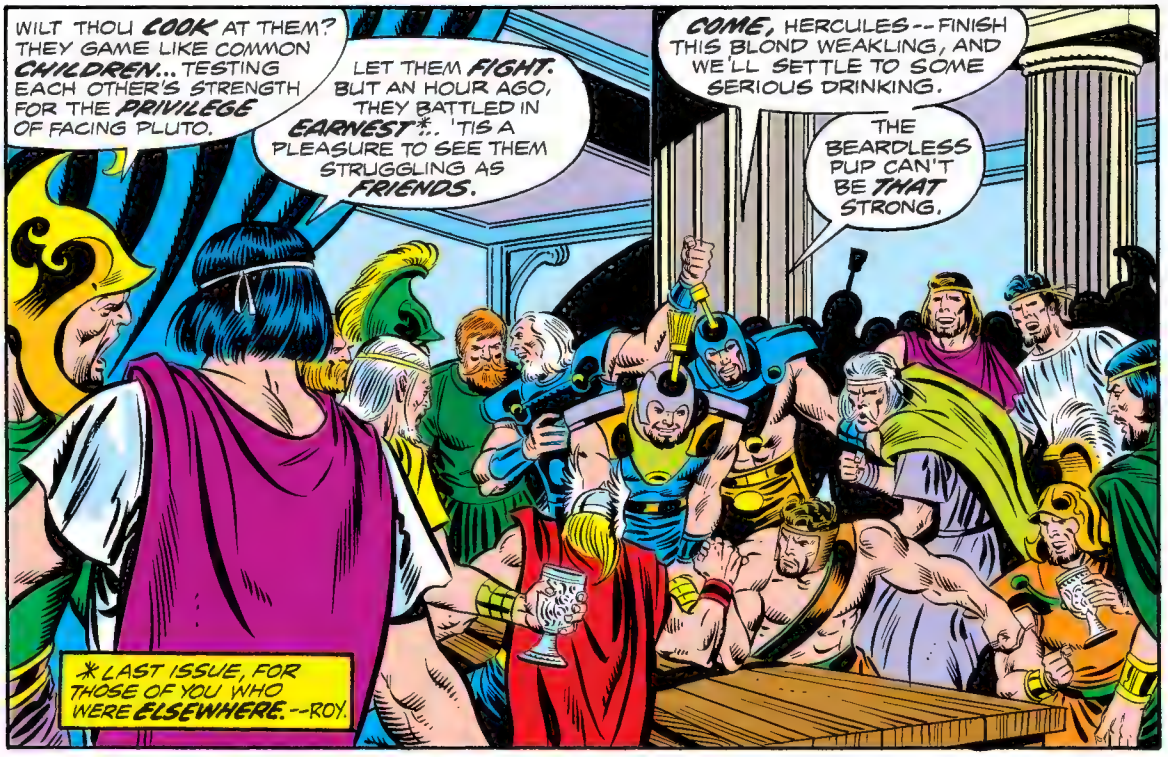
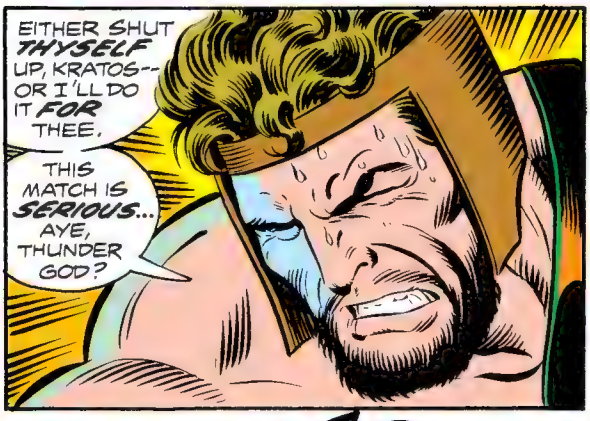
THE MIGHTY
THOR®
SIDE BY SIDE WITH HERCULES AGAINST THE WAR-GOD!
BATTLE AT THE GATES OF HELL!

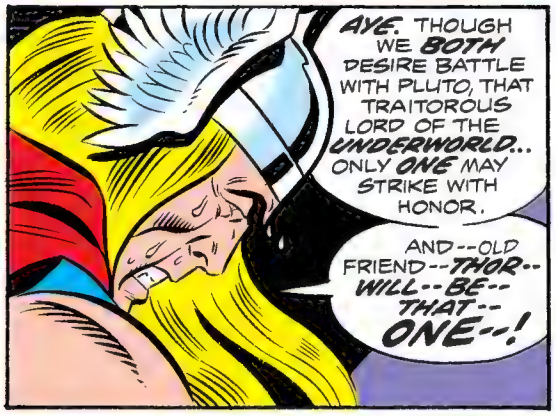
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE MIGHTY THOR!™

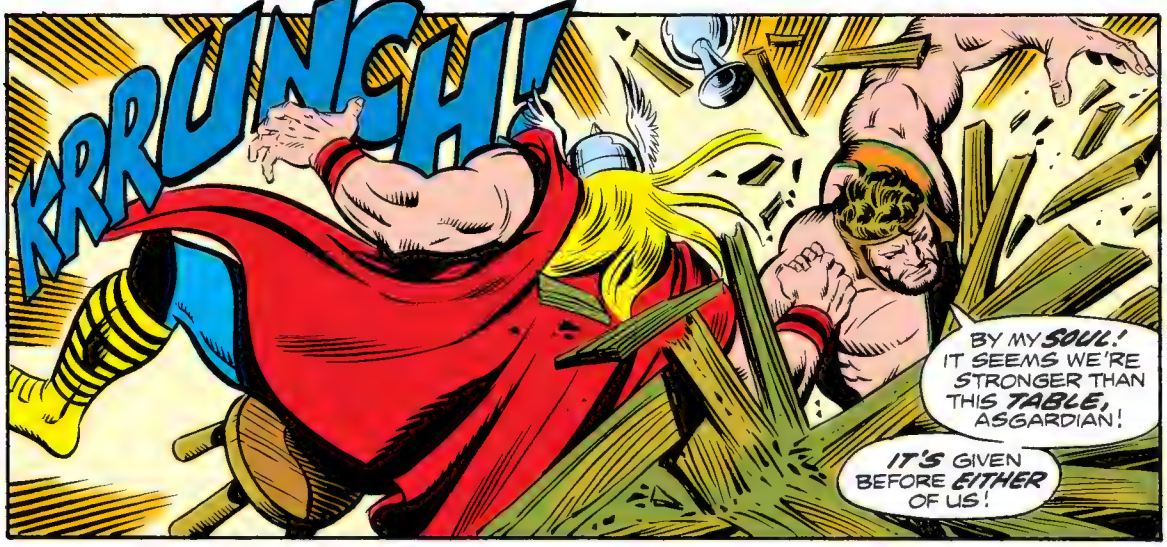
GERRY CONWAY / SCRIPTER | JOHN BUSCEMA & JOE SINNOTT / ARTISTS | JOHN COSTANZA, letterer | PETRA GOLDBERG, colorist | ROY THOMAS, EDITOR

BEFORE THE GATES OF HELL!
MY MONEY'S ON THOR-- THAT ASGARDIAN'S ARM IS STRONG AS STEEL!
THEN THOU ART A FOOL, DEMETROS --FOR HERCULES WILL WIN THIS BOUT, OR I'M A MORTAL KNAVE.
WELL, THOR... WILT THOU SURRENDER?
NEVER.
'TIS THOU WHO SHALT GIVE... OR FALL. SO SWEARS THE GOD OF THUNDER!


WILT THOU LOOK AT THEM? THEY GAME LIKE COMMON CHILDREN... TESTING EACH OTHER'S STRENGTH FOR THE PRIVILEGE OF FACING PLUTO.
LET THEM FIGHT. BUT AN HOUR AGO, THEY BATTLED IN EARNEST*.. 'TIS A PLEASURE TO SEE THEM STRUGGLING AS FRIENDS.
COME, HERCULES--FINISH THIS BLOND WEAKLING, AND WE'LL SETTLE TO SOME SERIOUS DRINKING.
THE BEARDLESS PUP CAN'T BE THAT STRONG.
*LAST ISSUE, FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO WERE ELSEWHERE.--ROY.


EITHER SHUT THYSELF UP, KRATOS--OR I'LL DO IT FOR THEE.
THIS MATCH IS SERIOUS... AYE, THUNDER GOD?

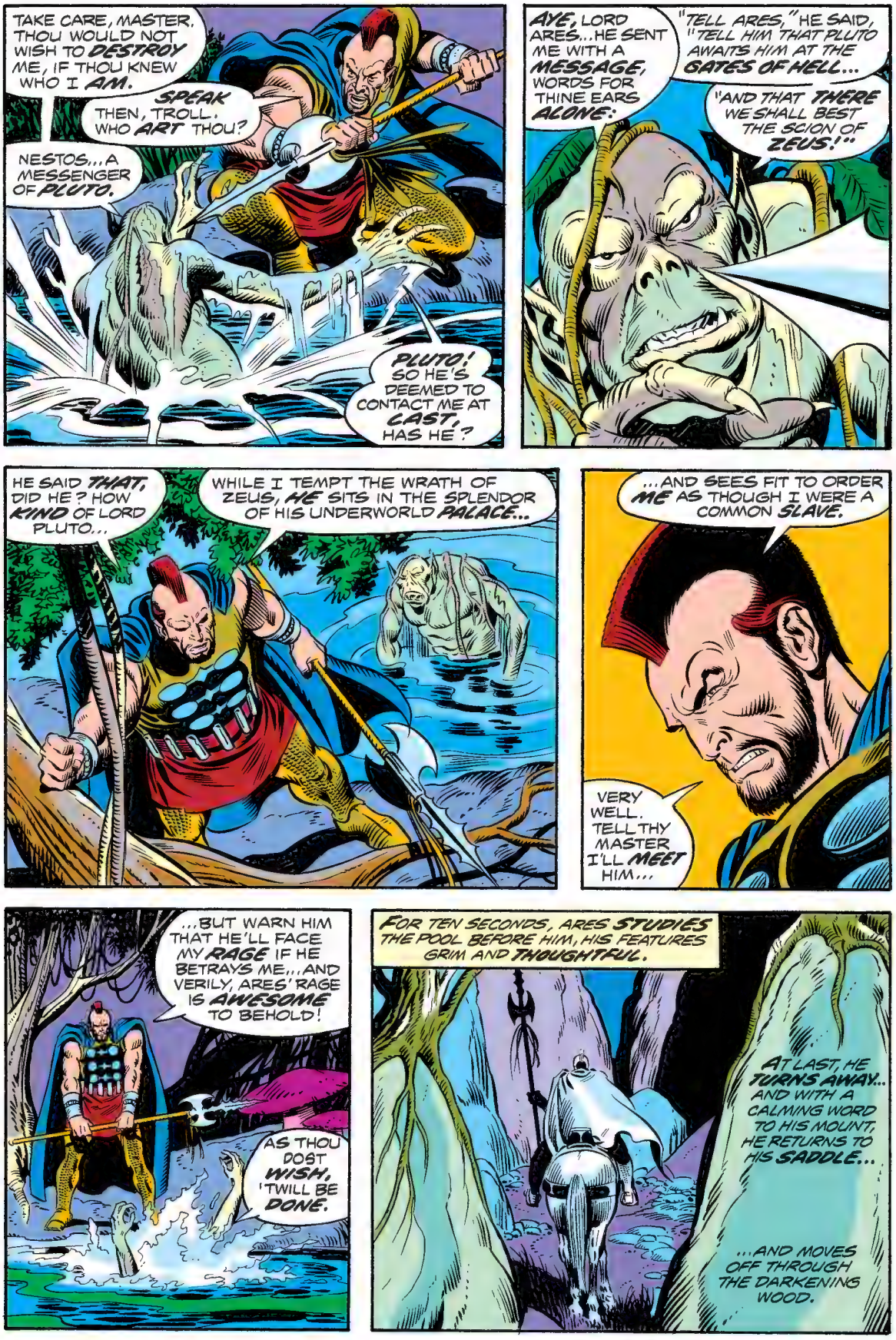

AYE. THOUGH WE BOTH DESIRE BATTLE WITH PLUTO, THAT TRAITOROUS LORD OF THE UNDERWORLD... ONLY ONE MAY STRIKE WITH HONOR.
AND--OLD FRIEND--THOR--WILL--BE--THAT--ONE--!


KRRUNCH!
BY MY SOUL! IT SEEMS WE'RE STRONGER THAN THIS TABLE, ASGARDIAN!
IT'S GIVEN BEFORE EITHER OF US!

SO, WILT THOU SURRENDER? OR MUST WE CONTINUE THIS BOUT?
MUCH AS I LOVE THEE AS A FRIEND, HERCULES--I SWEAR, THIS COMING BATTLE MUST BE MINE.
SO STAND TO, OLYMPIAN--THOR WILL NEVER SURRENDER, TO THEE OR ANY GOD.
SPAK!
VERILY, I DID FEAR THOU WOULD SAY THAT.
MY APOLOGIES, THOR--BUT HERCULES MUST WIN, NOW AS EVER.
THY FIST IS AS HARD AS THY HEAD, BEARDED ONE.
WERE IT NOT A MATTER OF HONOR, I WOULD SEND THEE 'GAINST OUR MUTUAL ENEMY--THAT THOU MIGHT PUMMEL HIM INSTEAD OF ME.
BUT SUCH IS NOT THE WAY OF THOR--
--THE SON OF ODIN--
--THE LORD OF THE LIVING THUNDER!
KABOOM!

WITH A SNARL OF GROWING RAGE, THE DARK-HAIRED SON OF ZEUS LUNGES -- AND LOCKING ARMS WITH THE SON OF ODIN, KICKS OUT --
-- TO BE MET WITH EQUAL FORCE FROM THE THEWS OF MIGHTY THOR.
FOR LONG SECONDS, THE TWO GODS STRUGGLE, EACH SEEKING THE UPPER HAND, TOO EVENLY MATCHED FOR EITHER TO SUCCEED...
THEN...
FOOLS! FOOLS THOU ART, AND FOOLS THOU SHALT REMAIN!
WHAT MEANS THIS NEW CONFLICT?
AND WHAT RIGHT HAVE YE TO BATTLE HERE?
FATHER ZEUS! BY THE STARS, I--
LET ME EXPLAIN, FRIEND HERCULES, AS A GUEST IN THY FATHER'S HOUSE, 'TIS MY INFRACTION,
WE BATTLE TO DECIDE WHICH OF US SHALL FACE PLUTO... A BATTLE AS YET UNDECIDED.
AND THOU DOST CALL THYSELF A MAN? YE BOTH DO ACT LIKE CHILDREN.
WHY NOT FIGHT TOGETHER... PAIRED AS ALLIES, NOT AS ENEMIES?
IN TRUTH, THE THOUGHT HAD CROSSED MY MIND, BUT I THOUGHT THOU--
-- AND I THOUGHT THAT THOU--
IT SEEMS WE HAVE BEEN FOOLS, MY FRIEND.
AYE, BUT FOOLS NO MORE.
THIS BATTLE WE'LL FIGHT TOGETHER, THOR-- AND AT ITS END, WE'LL SEE PLUTO DEAD!

PLUTO: THE LORD OF THE UNDERWORLD, THE MASTER OF THE UNLIVING. BUT IS HE THE ONLY OLYMPIAN GOD INVOLVED IN THIS AS-YET-UNREVEALED PLOT AGAINST ASGARD? OR IS THERE ANOTHER VILLAIN INVOLVED -- ONE WHOSE IDENTITY IS NOT YET KNOWN TO THOR AND HIS ENTHUSIASTIC COMPANION, HERCULES?
COULD IT BE THIS GOD, PERHAPS, NOW RIDING THROUGH THE DARK FOREST AT THE BASE OF MOUNT OLYMPUS?
COULD IT BE ARES...
...THE VOLATILE GOD OF WAR?
HE'S RIDDEN THIS FOREST TRAIL FOR AN HOUR, AND HAS REMAINED UNAPPROACHED BY EVEN THE MOST INQUISITIVE INHABITANT OF THIS WOOD...
...BUT NOW, AS HE DISMOUNTS TO QUENCH A MOST UN-GODLIKE THIRST...


TAKE CARE, MASTER, THOU WOULD NOT WISH TO DESTROY ME, IF THOU KNEW WHO I AM.
SPEAK THEN, TROLL. WHO ART THOU?
NESTOS,,, A MESSENGER OF PLUTO.
PLUTO! SO HE'S DEEMED TO CONTACT ME AT LAST, HAS HE?
AYE, LORD ARES...HE SENT ME WITH A MESSAGE, WORDS FOR THINE EARS ALONE:
"TELL ARES," HE SAID, "TELL HIM THAT PLUTO AWAITS HIM AT THE GATES OF HELL...
"AND THAT THERE WE SHALL BEST THE SCION OF ZEUS!"
HE SAID THAT, DID HE? HOW KIND OF LORD PLUTO...
WHILE I TEMPT THE WRATH OF ZEUS, HE SITS IN THE SPLENDOR OF HIS UNDERWORLD PALACE...
...AND SEES FIT TO ORDER ME AS THOUGH I WERE A COMMON SLAVE.
VERY WELL. TELL THY MASTER I'LL MEET HIM...
...BUT WARN HIM THAT HE'LL FACE MY RAGE IF HE BETRAYS ME,,,AND VERILY, ARES' RAGE IS AWESOME TO BEHOLD!
AS THOU DOST WISH, 'TWILL BE DONE.
FOR TEN SECONDS, ARES STUDIES THE POOL BEFORE HIM, HIS FEATURES GRIM AND THOUGHTFUL.
AT LAST, HE TURNS AWAY... AND WITH A CALMING WORD TO HIS MOUNT, HE RETURNS TO HIS SADDLE...
...AND MOVES OFF THROUGH THE DARKENING WOOD.

MEANWHILE, A COSMOS AWAY, OTHER MINDS PONDER THE FORTHCOMING PLIGHT OF HERCULES... AND ESPECIALLY, THE PLIGHT OF THOR...
MILORD ODIN, SOMETHING IS TERRIBLY WRONG! LOOK THEE AT YON VISI-GLOBE. IS THAT NOT THOR, WALKING WITH THE TRAITOR HERCULES?
HAS THE NOBLE THUNDER GOD BEEN TRICKED... OR HAVE WE?
QUIET, WOMAN. I MUST THINK ON THIS...
VERILY, ALL IS NOT WHAT IT SEEMS.
BUT MY LORD! THE GLOBE CANNOT LIE-- AND WHAT IT SHOWS US IS MADNESS!
IS THOR A TRAITOR TOO? HAS HE BE-TRAYED US?
LADY SIF SPEAKS MY HEART AS WELL, MILORD.
'TIS MY SISTER WHO SUFFERS PLUTO'S CHAINS--
--IF ANY HAS A RIGHT TO AN ANSWER, SURELY 'TIS I!
BEHOLD THE GLOBE, HILDEGARDE. THERE IS THY ANSWER.
THY SISTER KRISTA IS INDEED STILL A PRISONER.. STILL CHAINED BY THAT LORD, PLUTO.
YET-- PERHAPS WE WERE MISTAKEN TO THINK HERCULES A PART OF THIS TREACHERY,* PERHAPS THERE IS ANOTHER EXPLANATION--
* AS THEY DID LAST ISSUE. --RT.

--ONE THAT MY SON IS DISCOVERING, EVEN AS WE SPEAK.
HAVE FAITH, WOMEN. THOR HAS NE'ER BETRAYED US--NOR DOES HE NOW.
THOUGH AT TIMES WE TWO HAVE DISAGREED, NEVER HAVE I DOUBTED HIS SINCERITY...
...AND THOU MUST NOT DOUBT IT, IF THOU ART TO PROVE WORTHY OF THE NAME ASGARDIAN.
WE BOW TO THY WISDOM, LORD ODIN.
AS ALWAYS, THOU HAST SHOWN US THE WAY.
MY LORD, I AM CONCERNED. SOMETHING IN THY TONE BELIES THY APPARENT CONFIDENCE.
CAN IT BE THOU DOST HAVE DOUBTS THYSELF?
AYE, VIZIER...
WHAT GOD OR MAN IS EVER WITHOUT DOUBT? 'TIS THE NATURE OF BEING ALIVE.
IN TRUTH, I DO LOVE MY SON... YET HOW MAY I LET THAT BLIND ME?
THOR IS NOT ALL-KNOWING, VIZIER. I WORRY FOR HIM...
"I WORRY THAT HE MAY HAVE LET HIMSELF BE CONVINCED OF SOMETHING WHICH IS NOT TRUE...
"AND EVEN NOW, MAY BE WALKING INTO A TRAP...
"...TO BE FACED BY ANOTHER SHARP BETRAYAL."

THIS WAY, HERCULES? ART THOU CERTAIN?
AS CERTAIN AS I AM OF ANYTHING, FRIEND ASGARDIAN,
THE GATES OF HELL LIE SOUTH OF OLYMPUS. THERE SHALL WE FIND OUR FOE, AND THERE SHALL WE--UHHH!
--AND NOT MERELY TO DEATH?
WHAT, NO ANSWER, MY FRIEND? LET ME ANSWER THEN--
IT SEEMS THE PATH THOU HAST CHOSEN IS A WELL-TRAVELED ONE, HERCULES!
ART THOU SURE THIS ROUTE LEADS TO PLUTO--
SPAKO!
--AS ONLY THE GOD OF THUNDER CAN!
BACK, YE VERMIN OF THE NIGHT!
BACK! THE SON OF ODIN COMMANDS IT!

HO, THOR! NOW THIS IS A HEADY BATTLE, IS IT NOT?

IT CAN AS EASILY MAKE A MAN DEAD, OLYMPIAN.

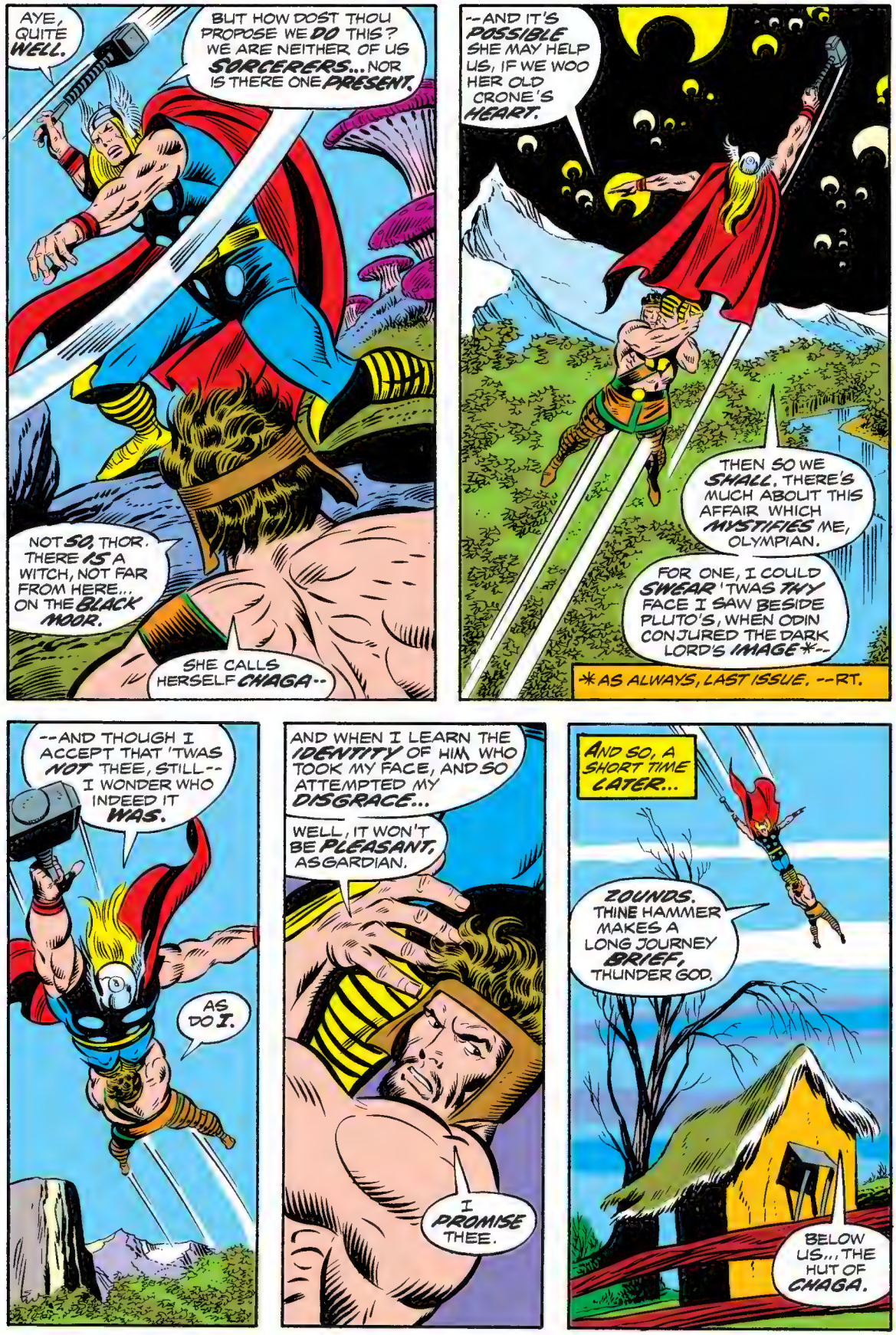
LET THESE DEMONS GET CLOSE ENOUGH, AND THEY'LL SLIT THY THROAT AS SOON AS COOK AT THEE!

THESE ARE ODDS FOR A GOD--NO PALTRY GROUP OF TROLLS, BUT A FULL ARMY!

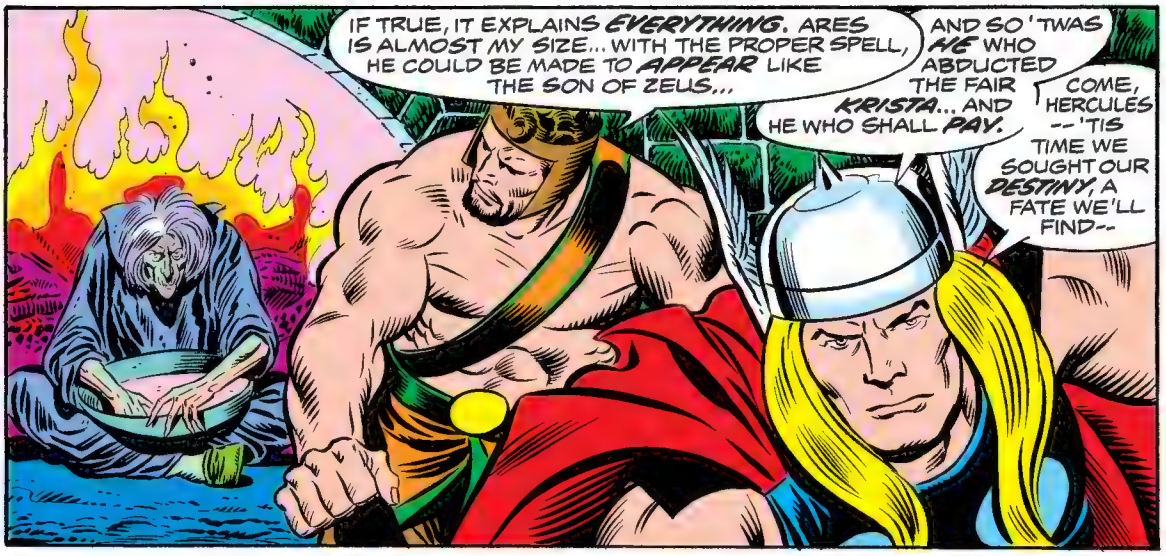
AH, IT MAKES THE BLOOD SING, ASGARDIAN! IT MAKES A MAN FEEL ALIVE!

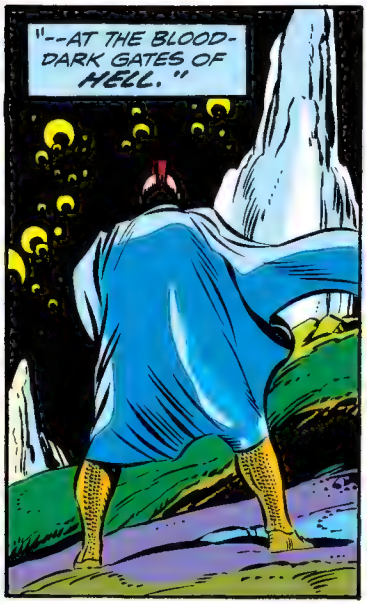
I'D LIKE TO SEE THEM TRY, BLONDHAIR--AH, I'D LIKE TO SEE THEM TRY!

HERCULES, THIS ATTACK PUZZLES ME.
ARE OUR MOVEMENTS SO PREDICTABLE THAT PLUTO CAN SEND HIS JACKALS AGAINST US 'ERE WE EVEN REACH HIS DOMAIN?
IF SO, IT BODES ILL FOR THE FUTURE, MY FRIEND--
FOR, IF PLUTO CAN KNOW OUR EVERY MOVE--
--WHILE WE MAY ONLY GUESS AT HIS--
KA-BOOM!
THEN INDEED, WE'RE AT A SORRY DISADVANTAGE!
ARE WE, ASGARDIAN? SOMEHOW, I HADN'T THOUGHT SO.
STILL, THOU MAY BE RIGHT. 'TIS A MATTER FOR SOME THINKING.
PERHAPS WE'D DO WELL TO MATCH OUR FOE'S GAME,,, BY PREDICTING HIS PLANS, EVEN AS HE PREDICTS OUR OWN!
DOST THOU CATCH MY MEANING?


AYE, QUITE WELL.
BUT HOW DOST THOU PROPOSE WE DO THIS? WE ARE NEITHER OF US SORCERERS... NOR IS THERE ONE PRESENT.
NOT SO, THOR. THERE IS A WITCH, NOT FAR FROM HERE... ON THE BLACK MOOR.
SHE CALLS HERSELF CHAGA--
--AND IT'S POSSIBLE SHE MAY HELP US, IF WE WOO HER OLD CRONE'S HEART.
THEN SO WE SHALL. THERE'S MUCH ABOUT THIS AFFAIR WHICH MYSTIFIES ME, OLYMPIAN.
FOR ONE, I COULD SWEAR 'TWAS THY FACE I SAW BESIDE PLUTO'S, WHEN ODIN CONJURED THE DARK LORD'S IMAGE*--
*AS ALWAYS, LAST ISSUE, --RT.
--AND THOUGH I ACCEPT THAT 'TWAS NOT THEE, STILL-- I WONDER WHO INDEED IT WAS.
AS DO I.
AND WHEN I LEARN THE IDENTITY OF HIM WHO TOOK MY FACE, AND SO ATTEMPTED MY DISGRACE...
WELL, IT WON'T BE PLEASANT, ASGARDIAN.
I PROMISE THEE.
AND SO, A SHORT TIME LATER...
ZOUNDS. THINE HAMMER MAKES A LONG JOURNEY BRIEF, THUNDER GOD.
BELOW US... THE HUT OF CHAGA.

OLD WOMAN, WILT THOU SEE US?
HERCULES OF OLYMPUS AND THOR OF ASGARD REQUIRE THINE AID.
'TIS A SMALL MATTER OF--
I KNOW WHAT IT'S A SMALL MATTER OF, THOU BULGING BUFFOON. GET THEE HENCE, LEST THOU ALLOW A DRAFT TO CHILL THESE ANCIENT BONES.
I'LL HELP THEE, BUT THERE'S A PRICE FOR CHAGA'S AID, AS THOU DOST WELL KNOW.
THOU MUST SIT, AND TELL ME OF THE OUTSIDE WORLD.
'TIS BEEN MANY YEARS SINCE LAST I'VE SEEN IT...
AN HOUR DRIFTS BY IN MELLOW CONVERSATION, AND WHILE THE WINDS OF TWILIGHT BREW OUTSIDE OLD CHAGA'S HUT, OUR HEROES TALK WITHIN, UNTIL...
AND WHAT HAST THOU TO SAY TO US, WOMAN?
WHAT OF PLUTO... WHAT THREAT MAY WE EXPECT FROM THAT PERFIDIOUS GOD?
AND MORE--WHO TOOK MY IDENTITY, AND PLAYED A LIE AGAINST ME?
I'VE LOOKED WITHIN THE ASHES OF OUR FIRE, CONTAINED WITHIN THIS BOWL--
--AND WHAT I'VE SEEN FRIGHTENS ME.
HOW SO?
VIOLENCE, GODLING... VIOLENCE BETWEEN THEE AND ANOTHER GOD ALMOST AS POWERFUL AS THEE...
I SEE HIS FACE ...AYE, I SEE HIM AWAITING THEE AT THE GATES OF HELL...
'TIS ARES, GOD OF WAR!


IF TRUE, IT EXPLAINS EVERYTHING. ARES IS ALMOST MY SIZE... WITH THE PROPER SPELL, HE COULD BE MADE TO APPEAR LIKE THE SON OF ZEUS...
AND SO 'TWAS HE WHO ABDUCTED THE FAIR KRISTA... AND HE WHO SHALL PAY.
COME, HERCULES --'TIS TIME WE SOUGHT OUR DESTINY, A FATE WE'LL FIND--

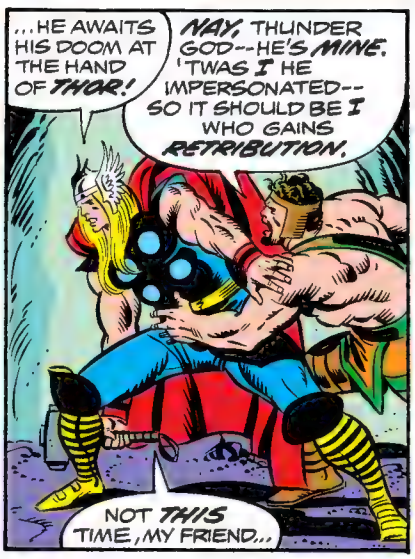

"--AT THE BLOOD-DARK GATES OF HELL."

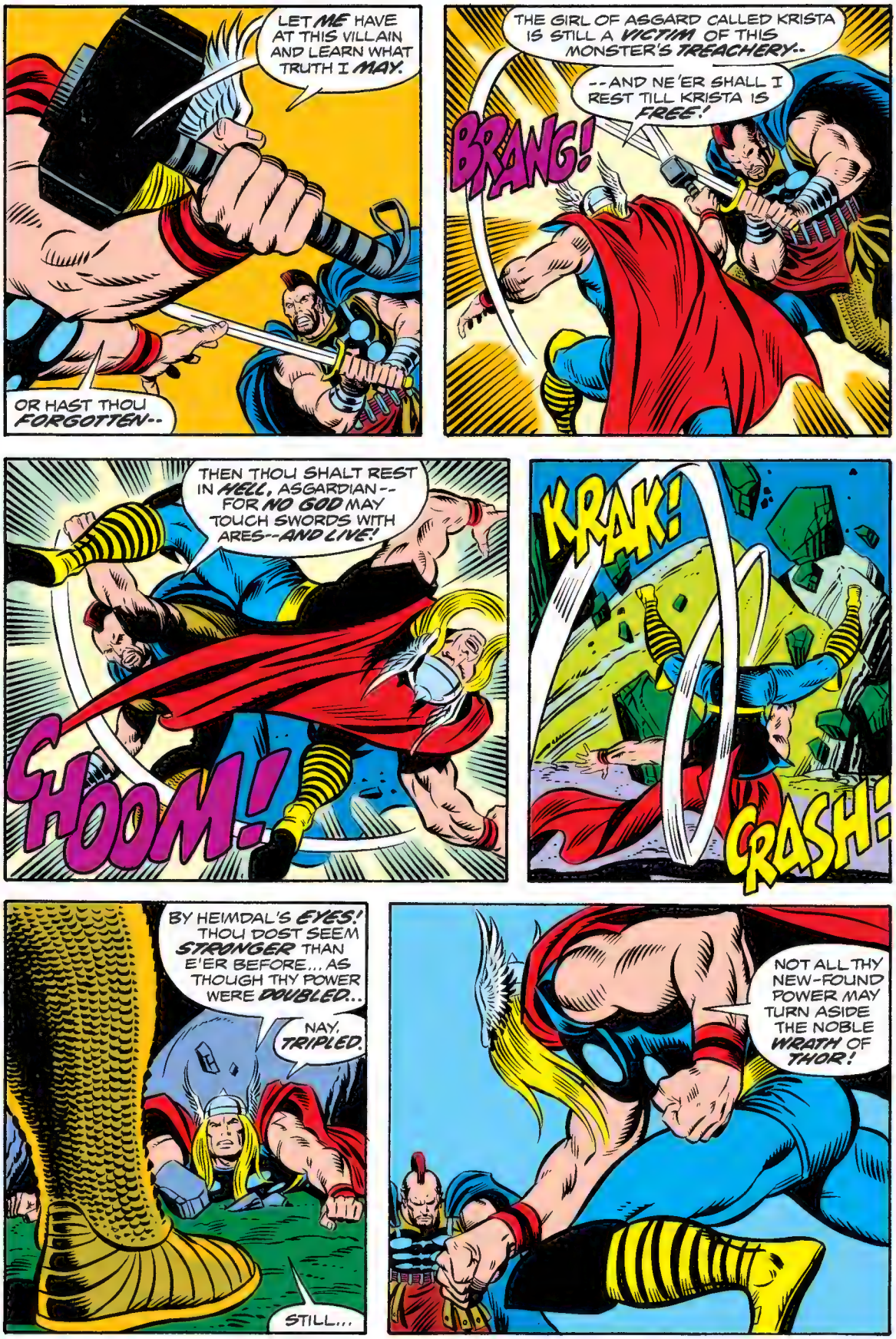
MORE THAN DESTINY WILL THE ASGARDIANS FIND BEFORE THAT HAUNTED ENTRANCE. FOR, EVEN AS THEY FLY SOUTH, ONE THERE IS WHO WAITS FOR THEM...

...HIS GRIM EYES BURNING WITH COLD INSANITY AS HE WATCHES THE NORTHERN SKY, AND AT LAST...

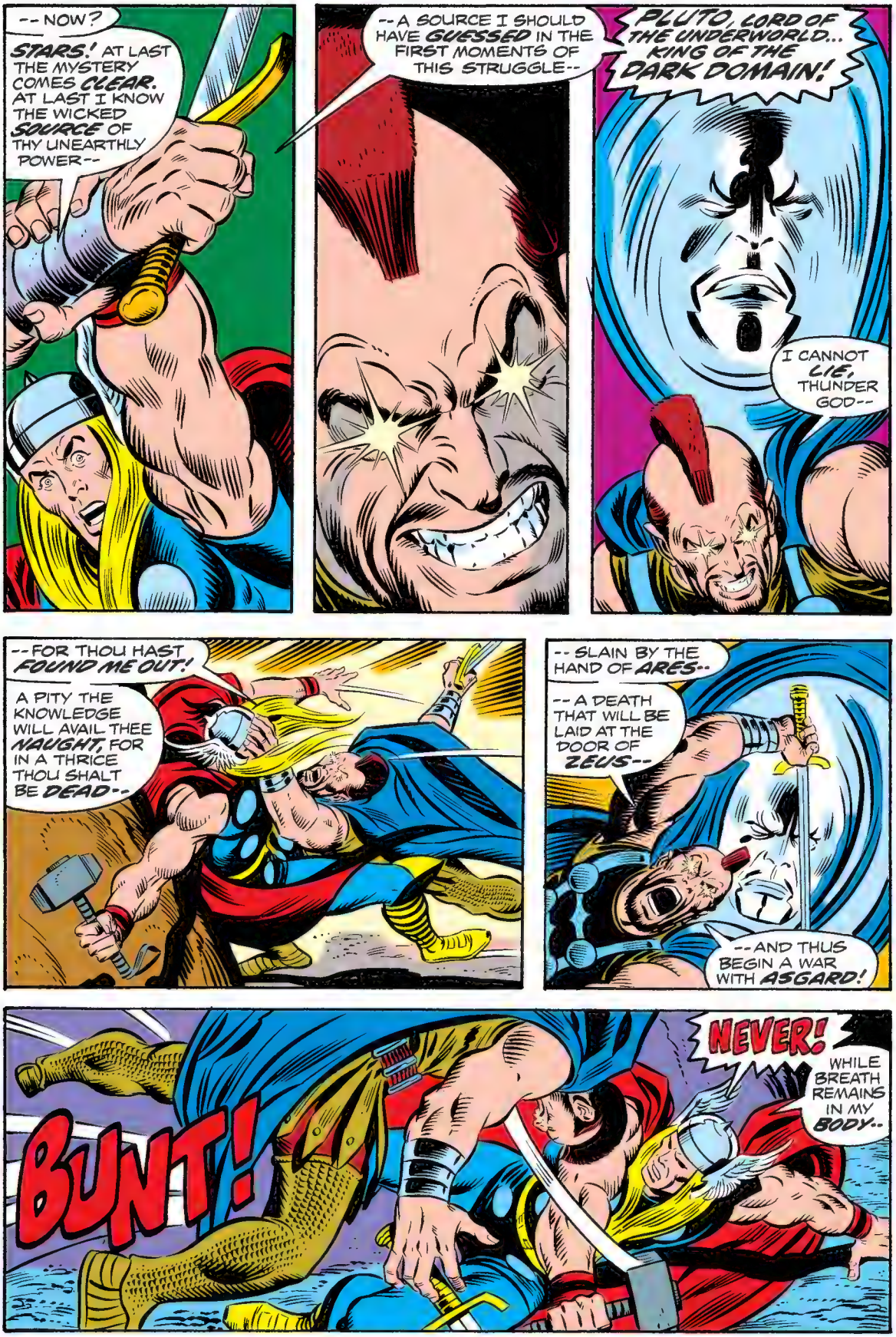
...SEES THEM.
TIGHTLY, HE SMILES... AND HIS SMILE IS ONE OF TRIUMPH.

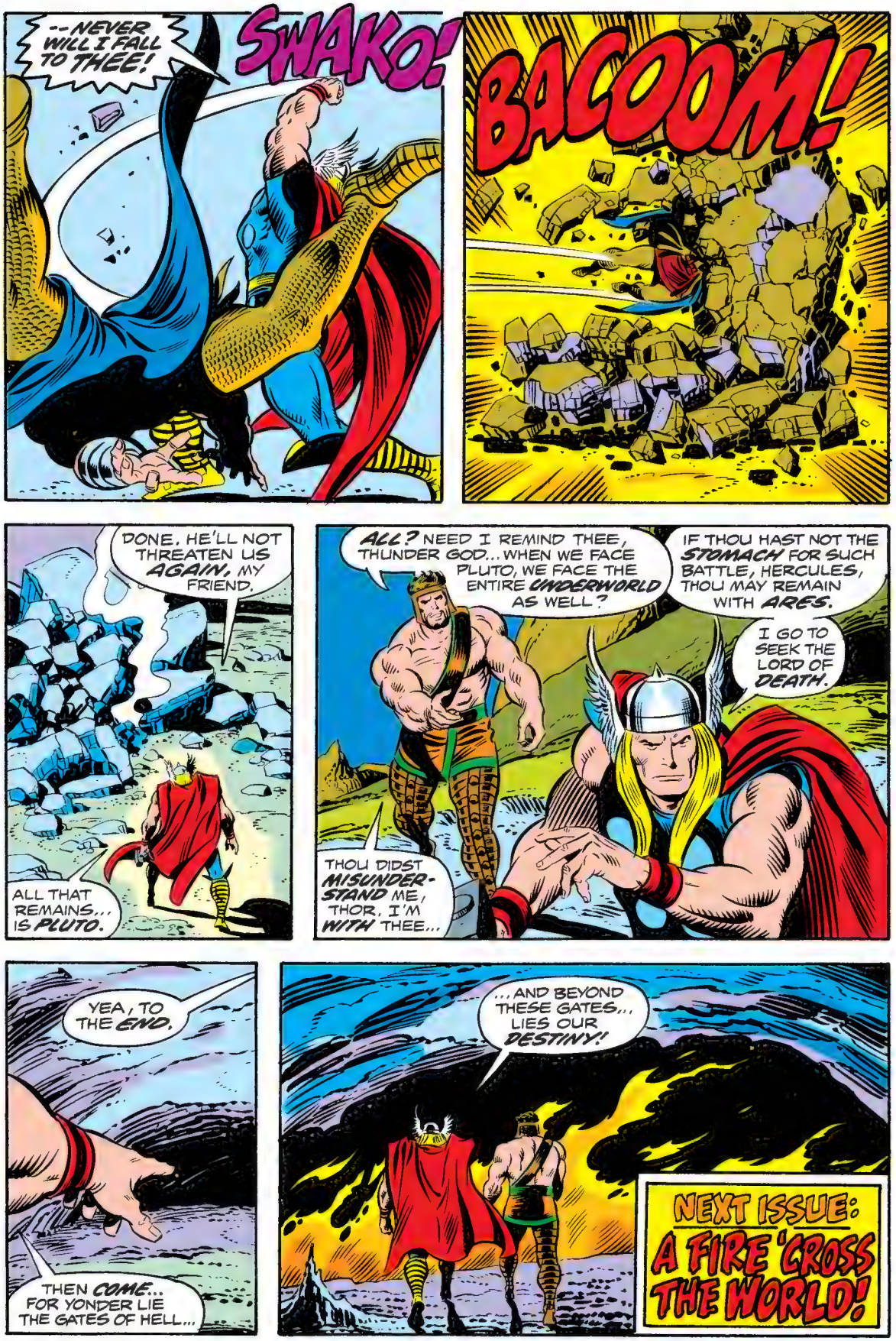
THERE, HERCULES.
THE WITCH WAS RIGHT... HE WAITS.


...HE AWAITS HIS DOOM AT THE HAND OF THOR!
NAY, THUNDER GOD--HE'S MINE. 'TWAS I HE IMPERSONATED-- SO IT SHOULD BE I WHO GAINS RETRIBUTION.
NOT THIS TIME, MY FRIEND...


LET ME HAVE AT THIS VILLAIN AND LEARN WHAT TRUTH I MAY.
OR HAST THOU FORGOTTEN--
THE GIRL OF ASGARD CALLED KRISTA IS STILL A VICTIM OF THIS MONSTER'S TREACHERY--
--AND NE'ER SHALL I REST TILL KRISTA IS FREE!
BRANG!
THEN THOU SHALT REST IN HELL, ASGARDIAN-- FOR NO GOD MAY TOUCH SWORDS WITH ARES--AND LIVE!
HOOM!
KRAK!
CRASH!
BY HEIMDAL'S EYES! THOU DOST SEEM STRONGER THAN E'ER BEFORE... AS THOUGH THY POWER WERE DOUBLED...
NAY, TRIPLED.
STILL...
NOT ALL THY NEW-FOUND POWER MAY TURN ASIDE THE NOBLE WRATH OF THOR!

ZAROOM!
A FAIR BLOW, ASGARDIAN-- YET NOT A FATAL ONE.
AS THOU NOTICED, MY STRENGTH IS THREEFOLD NOW-- MORE THAN ENOUGH TO SHIRK THY MOST VICIOUS THRUSTS!
BUT THOU, THOR... THOU ART THE SAME AS EVER...
...AND EVEN THOU SHALT HAVE A TIME SHIRKING--
--THIS!
KKRUNNCH!
AN AMAZING HAMMER, THOR. TWICE NOW, I'VE SEEN IT PERFORM MIRACLES THIS DAY...
VERILY, 'TIS A MOST IMPRESSIVE MALLET INDEED.
MIGHT I ASK--?
'TWAS A GIFT FROM MY FATHER, HERCULES-- A MYSTIC MALLET OF URU METAL, FORGED IN THE FURNACES OF GEURRIDOUR--!
ALWAYS, IT MUST RETURN TO ME-- AND ONLY BY MY HAND MAY IT BE LIFTED.
BUT NOW IS NOT THE TIME FOR HISTORIES, RATHER, 'TIS A MOMENT OF HISTORY, A MOMENT WHICH CLOSES--


-- NOW?
STARS! AT LAST THE MYSTERY COMES CLEAR. AT LAST I KNOW THE WICKED SOURCE OF THY UNEARTHLY POWER--
--A SOURCE I SHOULD HAVE GUESSED IN THE FIRST MOMENTS OF THIS STRUGGLE--
PLUTO, LORD OF THE UNDERWORLD... KING OF THE DARK DOMAIN!
I CANNOT LIE, THUNDER GOD--
--FOR THOU HAST FOUND ME OUT!
A PITY THE KNOWLEDGE WILL AVAIL THEE NAUGHT, FOR IN A THRICE THOU SHALT BE DEAD--
-- SLAIN BY THE HAND OF ARES--
--A DEATH THAT WILL BE LAID AT THE DOOR OF ZEUS--
--AND THUS BEGIN A WAR WITH ASGARD!
BUNT!
NEVER!
WHILE BREATH REMAINS IN MY BODY--


--NEVER WILL I FALL TO THEE!
SWAKO!
BACOOM!
DONE, HE'LL NOT THREATEN US AGAIN, MY FRIEND.
ALL THAT REMAINS... IS PLUTO.
ALL? NEED I REMIND THEE, THUNDER GOD... WHEN WE FACE PLUTO, WE FACE THE ENTIRE UNDERWORLD AS WELL?
IF THOU HAST NOT THE STOMACH FOR SUCH BATTLE, HERCULES, THOU MAY REMAIN WITH ARES.
I GO TO SEEK THE LORD OF DEATH.
THOU DIDST MISUNDERSTAND ME, THOR. I'M WITH THEE...
YEA, TO THE END.
THEN COME... FOR YONDER LIE THE GATES OF HELL...
...AND BEYOND THESE GATES... LIES OUR DESTINY!
NEXT ISSUE:
A FIRE 'CROSS THE WORLD!

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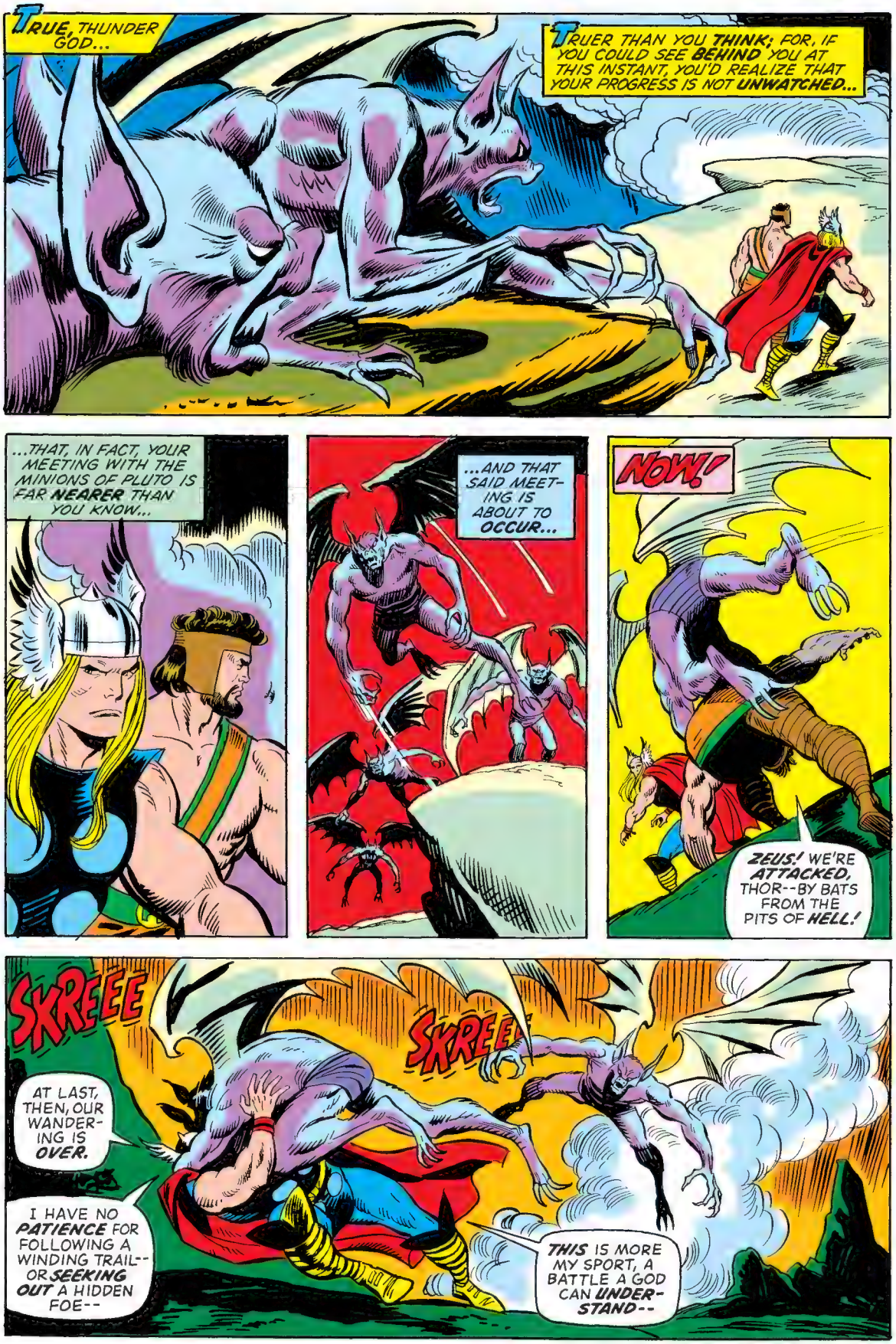
THE MIGHTY
THOR
FIRE-SWORD VS. HAMMER!
GOD BATTLES GOD!
...AND ONE MUST FALL!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE MIGHTY THOR!™

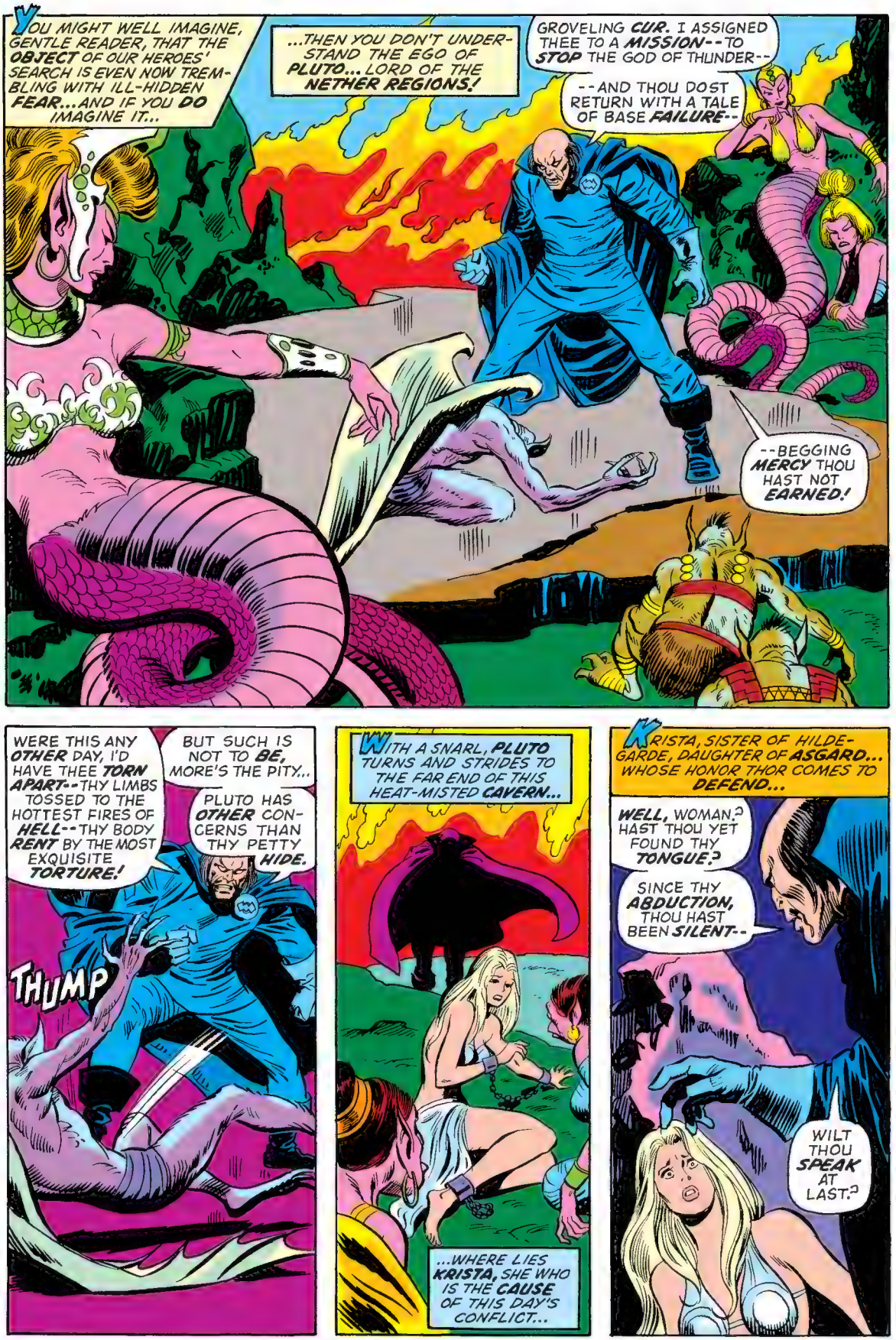
GERRY CONWAY * WRITER | JOHN BUSCEMA * ARTIST | MIKE ESPOSITO * INKER | ARTIE SIMEK, LETTERER P. GOLDBERG, COLORIST * ROY THOMAS EDITOR

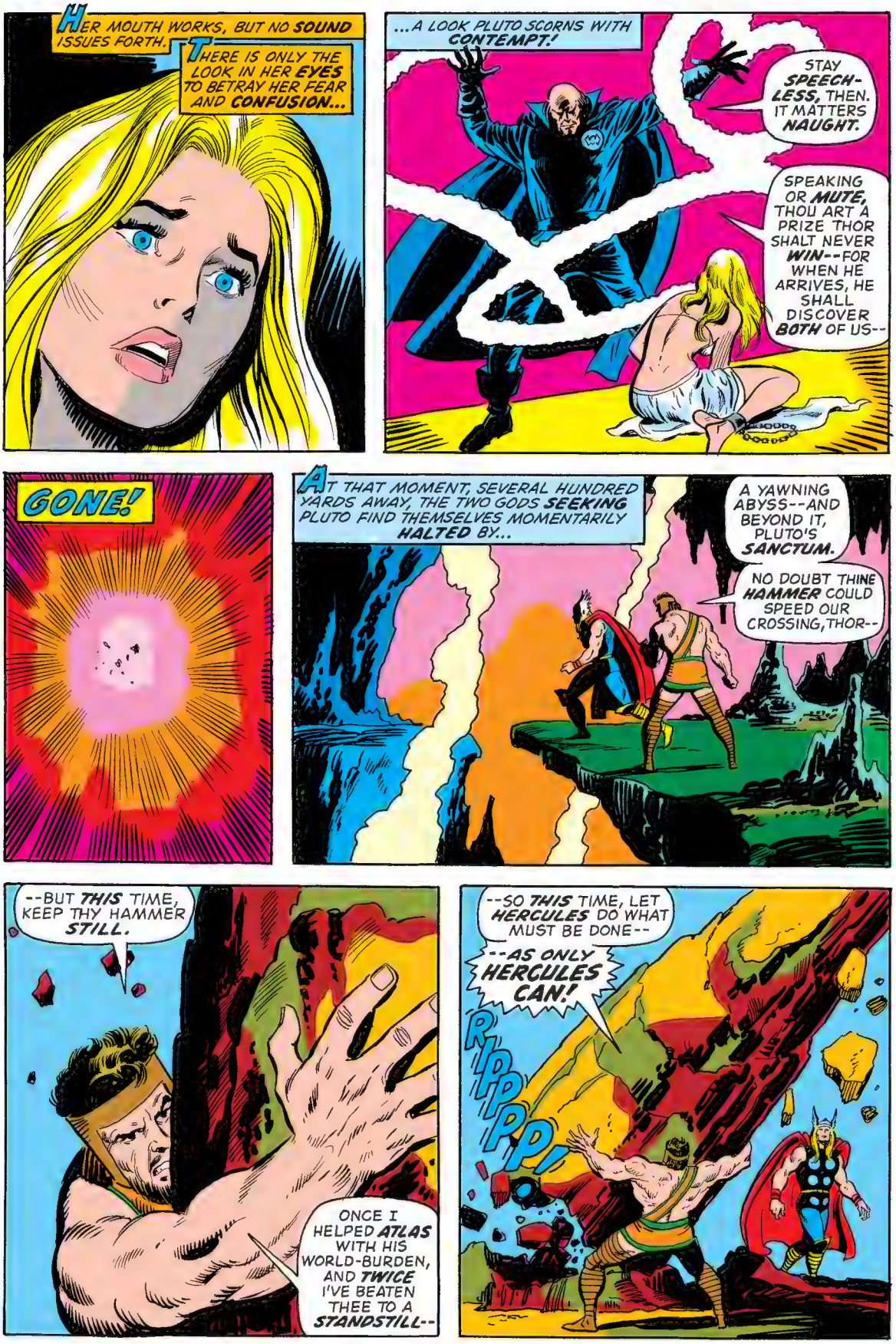
HAVING FOUGHT AND DEFEATED ARES, THE GREEK GOD OF WAR, THOR AND HIS COMPANION, HERCULES, DESCEND TO THE DEPTHS OF HELL ITSELF...
HELLFIRE ACROSS THE WORLD!
...THERE TO SEEK OUT PLUTO, LORD OF THE NETHERWORLD, FOR THEIR LAST AND MOST DANGEROUS BATTLE!
WATCH THY STEP, HERCULES. THIS PATH IS UNEVEN AT BEST.
AND IN THIS DARKNESS, ONLY A BAT CAN SAFELY FIND HIS WAY.
THEN LET'S FIND A BAT AND USE HIM AS A GUIDE, ASGARDIAN.
I WANT TO TWIST THE DARK LORD'S NECK--NOT STUMBLE AROUND IN DARKNESS FOREVER.
PATIENCE, HERCULES. ALL WILL COME IN TIME, I ASSURE THEE.

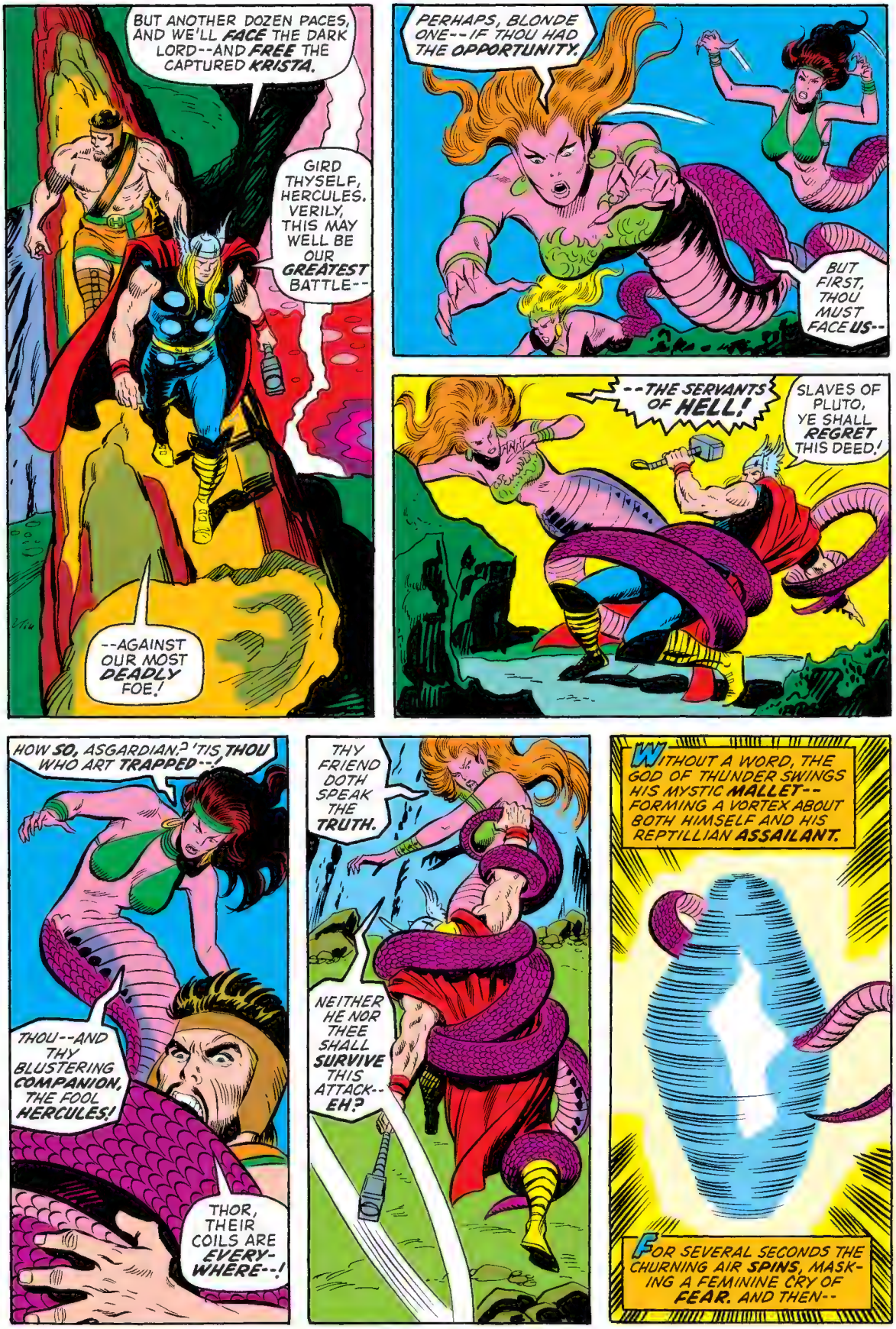

TRUE, THUNDER GOD...
TRUER THAN YOU THINK; FOR, IF YOU COULD SEE BEHIND YOU AT THIS INSTANT, YOU'D REALIZE THAT YOUR PROGRESS IS NOT UNWATCHED..
...THAT, IN FACT, YOUR MEETING WITH THE MINIONS OF PLUTO IS FAR NEARER THAN YOU KNOW...
...AND THAT SAID MEETING IS ABOUT TO OCCUR...
NOW!
ZEUS! WE'RE ATTACKED, THOR--BY BATS FROM THE PITS OF HELL!
SKREEE
SKREEE
AT LAST, THEN, OUR WANDERING IS OVER.
I HAVE NO PATIENCE FOR FOLLOWING A WINDING TRAIL--OR SEEKING OUT A HIDDEN FOE--
THIS IS MORE MY SPORT, A BATTLE A GOD CAN UNDERSTAND--

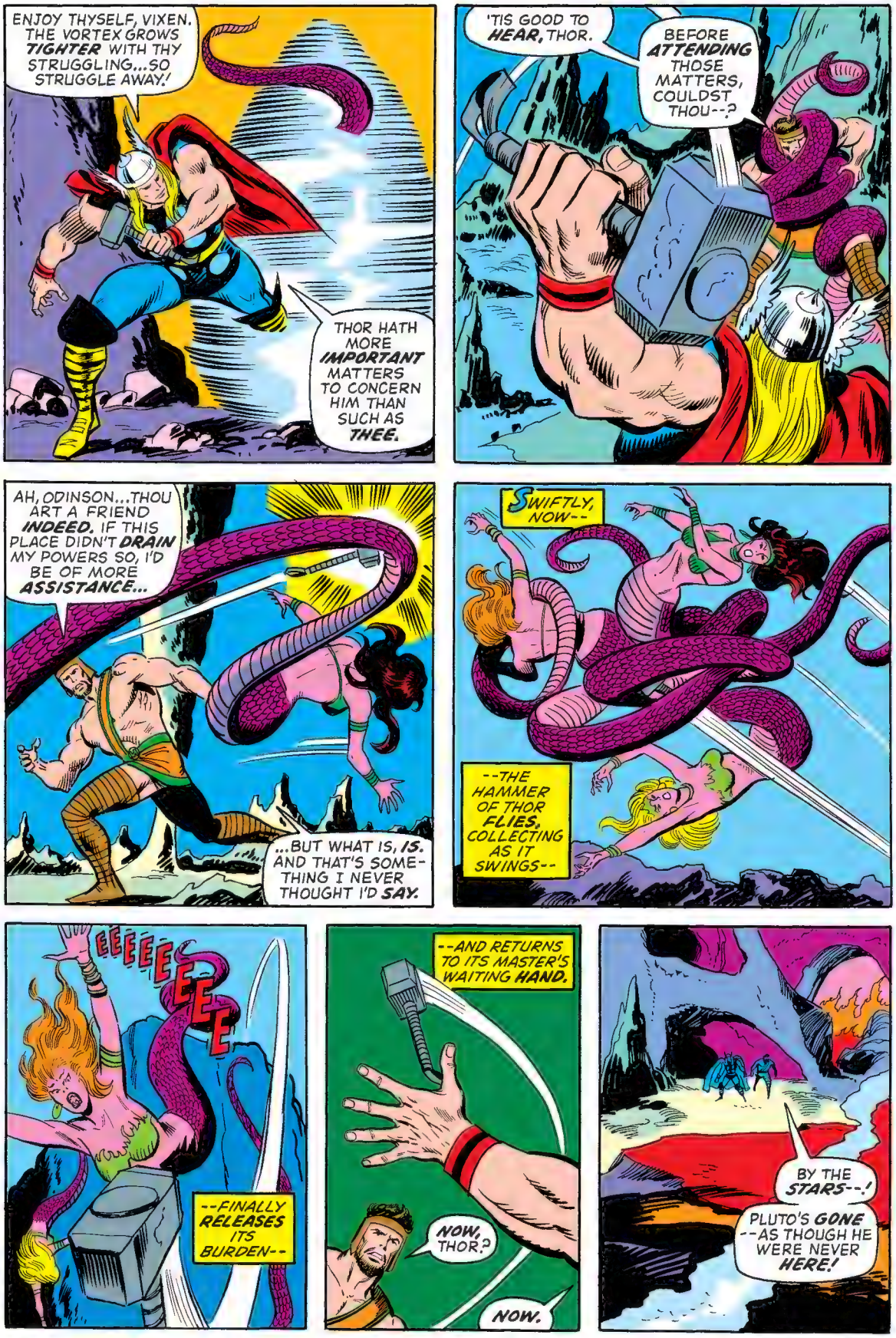
SPAF!
--A THREAT HE CAN TRULY FIGHT!
HO! THESE BAT-DEMONS HAVE MORE SPIRIT THAN I'D THOUGHT.
ONE FALLS, AND ANOTHER REPLACES HIM!
SKREEE
WELL THEN, DEMON, COME--
--AND WE'LL MAKE THIS FALL TOGETHER!
WHY, WHAT'S WRONG, DEMON? THOU DOST STRUGGLE AS THOUGH AFRAID--!
DOST THOU NOT HAVE WINGS? AND I, ONLY MY HAMMER--
--THAT HAMMER WHICH WAS A GIFT FROM MY FATHER, ODIN--THAT HAMMER CALLED MJOLNIR--
BUNCH!
--WITH WHICH I STRIKE--
--AND THEREAFTER, FLY AWAY!
SPASH!
SKREEEE

WHAT'S THIS? TROUBLE, FRIEND HERCULES?
THOU ART A SON OF ZEUS, AND THY STRENGTH MOST NEARLY EQUALS MINE OWN...
CAN IT BE THOU DOST FIND DIFFICULTY IN FIGHTING DEMONS SUCH AS THESE?
SKREEE
DO NOT MOCK ME, THOR. MY POWERS ARE WEAKENED HERE.
OR HAST THOU ALREADY FORGOTTEN?
ONCE PLUTO ALMOST TRAPPED ME IN THIS NIGHTMARE KINGDOM--TRAPPED ME FOR ALL ETERNITY! *
* THOR #130. --RT.
AYE, I REMEMBER.
I SAVED THEE THEN, HERCULES, WHEN NO OTHER GOD WOULD AID THEE-- AND I'LL SAVE THEE AGAIN--
--AS BEFITS A NOBLEMAN BORN!
WHAM
BAROOM!
WELL DONE.
TOGETHER, WE HAVE DEFEATED THESE BEASTS. IT'S TIME WE FACED THEIR LORD--THAT MASTER OF TREACHERY, THAT DARK PRINCE OF DECEIT: PLUTO--
HE WHO MUST BE DESTROYED!


YOU MIGHT WELL IMAGINE, GENTLE READER, THAT THE OBJECT OF OUR HEROES' SEARCH IS EVEN NOW TREMBLING WITH ILL-HIDDEN FEAR... AND IF YOU DO IMAGINE IT...
...THEN YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND THE EGO OF PLUTO... LORD OF THE NETHER REGIONS!
GROVELING CUR. I ASSIGNED THEE TO A MISSION--TO STOP THE GOD OF THUNDER--
--AND THOU DOST RETURN WITH A TALE OF BASE FAILURE--
--BEGGING MERCY THOU HAST NOT EARNED!
WERE THIS ANY OTHER DAY, I'D HAVE THEE TORN APART--THY LIMBS TOSSED TO THE HOTTEST FIRES OF HELL--THY BODY RENT BY THE MOST EXQUISITE TORTURE!
BUT SUCH IS NOT TO BE, MORE'S THE PITY...
PLUTO HAS OTHER CONCERNS THAN THY PETTY HIDE.
THUMP
WITH A SNARL, PLUTO TURNS AND STRIDES TO THE FAR END OF THIS HEAT-MISTED CAVERN...
...WHERE LIES KRISTA, SHE WHO IS THE CAUSE OF THIS DAY'S CONFLICT...
KRISTA, SISTER OF HILDEGARDE, DAUGHTER OF ASGARD... WHOSE HONOR THOR COMES TO DEFEND...
WELL, WOMAN, HAST THOU YET FOUND THY TONGUE?
SINCE THY ABDUCTION, THOU HAST BEEN SILENT--
WILT THOU SPEAK AT LAST?


HER MOUTH WORKS, BUT NO SOUND ISSUES FORTH.
THERE IS ONLY THE LOOK IN HER EYES TO BETRAY HER FEAR AND CONFUSION...
...A LOOK PLUTO SCORNS WITH CONTEMPT!
STAY SPEECH-LESS, THEN. IT MATTERS NAUGHT.
SPEAKING OR MUTE, THOU ART A PRIZE THOR SHALT NEVER WIN--FOR WHEN HE ARRIVES, HE SHALL DISCOVER BOTH OF US--
GONE!
AT THAT MOMENT, SEVERAL HUNDRED YARDS AWAY, THE TWO GODS SEEKING PLUTO FIND THEMSELVES MOMENTARILY HALTED BY..
A YAWNING ABYSS--AND BEYOND IT, PLUTO'S SANCTUM.
NO DOUBT THINE HAMMER COULD SPEED OUR CROSSING, THOR--
--BUT THIS TIME, KEEP THY HAMMER STILL.
ONCE I HELPED ATLAS WITH HIS WORLD-BURDEN, AND TWICE I'VE BEATEN THEE TO A STANDSTILL--
--SO THIS TIME, LET HERCULES DO WHAT MUST BE DONE--
--AS ONLY HERCULES CAN!
RIPPP!


BUT ANOTHER DOZEN PACES, AND WE'LL FACE THE DARK LORD--AND FREE THE CAPTURED KRISTA.
GIRD THYSELF, HERCULES. VERILY, THIS MAY WELL BE OUR GREATEST BATTLE--
--AGAINST OUR MOST DEADLY FOE!
PERHAPS, BLONDE ONE--IF THOU HAD THE OPPORTUNITY.
BUT FIRST, THOU MUST FACE US--
--THE SERVANTS OF HELL!
SLAVES OF PLUTO, YE SHALL REGRET THIS DEED!
HOW SO, ASGARDIAN? 'TIS THOU WHO ART TRAPPED--!
THOU--AND THY BLUSTERING COMPANION, THE FOOL HERCULES!
THOR, THEIR COILS ARE EVERY-WHERE--!
THY FRIEND DOTH SPEAK THE TRUTH.
NEITHER HE NOR THEE SHALL SURVIVE THIS ATTACK--EH?
WITHOUT A WORD, THE GOD OF THUNDER SWINGS HIS MYSTIC MALLET--FORMING A VORTEX ABOUT BOTH HIMSELF AND HIS REPTILLIAN ASSAILANT.
FOR SEVERAL SECONDS THE CHURNING AIR SPINS, MASK-ING A FEMININE CRY OF FEAR. AND THEN--


ENJOY THYSELF, VIXEN. THE VORTEX GROWS TIGHTER WITH THY STRUGGLING...SO STRUGGLE AWAY!
THOR HATH MORE IMPORTANT MATTERS TO CONCERN HIM THAN SUCH AS THEE.
'TIS GOOD TO HEAR, THOR.
BEFORE ATTENDING THOSE MATTERS, COULDST THOU--?
AH, ODINSON...THOU ART A FRIEND INDEED. IF THIS PLACE DIDN'T DRAIN MY POWERS SO, I'D BE OF MORE ASSISTANCE...
...BUT WHAT IS, IS. AND THAT'S SOMETHING I NEVER THOUGHT I'D SAY.
SWIFTLY, NOW--
--THE HAMMER OF THOR FLIES, COLLECTING AS IT SWINGS--
EEEEEEEEE
--FINALLY RELEASES ITS BURDEN--
--AND RETURNS TO ITS MASTER'S WAITING HAND.
NOW, THOR?
NOW.
BY THE STARS--!
PLUTO'S GONE --AS THOUGH HE WERE NEVER HERE!

I SENSE PERFIDY IN THIS, THUNDER GOD...AYE, I CAN SMELL THE DARK LORD'S TRICKERY.
WHILE WE FOUGHT HIS SERVANTS, HE STOLE OUT ANOTHER WAY.
TAKING THE GIRL WITH HIM!
SO IT SEEMS.
THE QUESTION IS--WHERE HAS HE TAKEN HER?
IT'S A QUESTION WE CAN'T ANSWER--
--BUT THE ALL-FATHER CAN!
SPABOOM!
MEANWHILE (HOW ELSE CAN YOU DESCRIBE INSTANTANEOUS TRAVEL?)...
THOU DOST KNOW A FEW TRICKS THYSELF, THOR.
WE'RE ON THE RAINBOW BRIDGE, ARE WE NOT?
AYE, I'VE SEEN THIS LAND BEFORE...
...ASGARD!
NOT A VERY HANDSOME PLACE, THOR...NOT AT ALL LIKE OLYMPUS.
WHERE ARE THE SPIRES, THE GRACEFUL COLUMNS? BY MY BEARD, WHERE'S THY SENSE OF TASTE?
BETTER TO ASK, WHERE IS THINE?
AS A MORTAL ONCE SAID...
"...BEAUTY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER."
I'LL TAKE THE SOLID WALLS OF ASGARD OVER THE AIRY CORRIDORS OF OLYMPUS ON ANY OCCASION, FRIEND. THEY GIVE THIS LAND A SENSE OF WEIGHT.
TO THEE, PERHAPS...
TO ME THESE "SOLID WALLS" ARE THE UGLIEST THINGS I'VE EVER SEEN.

HOLD THY TONGUE. WE APPROACH THE *ODIN CHAMBER.*

NO DOUBT, WE'LL HAVE TO *FORCE* OUR WAY IN.

WHAT *ELSE?*

IN ALL THE YEARS I'VE *LIVED,* I'VE NEVER YET KNOWN A GUARD WHO HAD MORE BRAINS THAN A *FISH.*

WILT THOU *STAND ASIDE*--OR MUST WE *STRIKE?*

WE HAVE OUR *ORDERS,* ODINSON:

NONE MAY *ENTER*-- NOT EVEN *THEE.*

STARS! DON'T THEY *EVER* LEARN?

SWOOP!

SWISH!

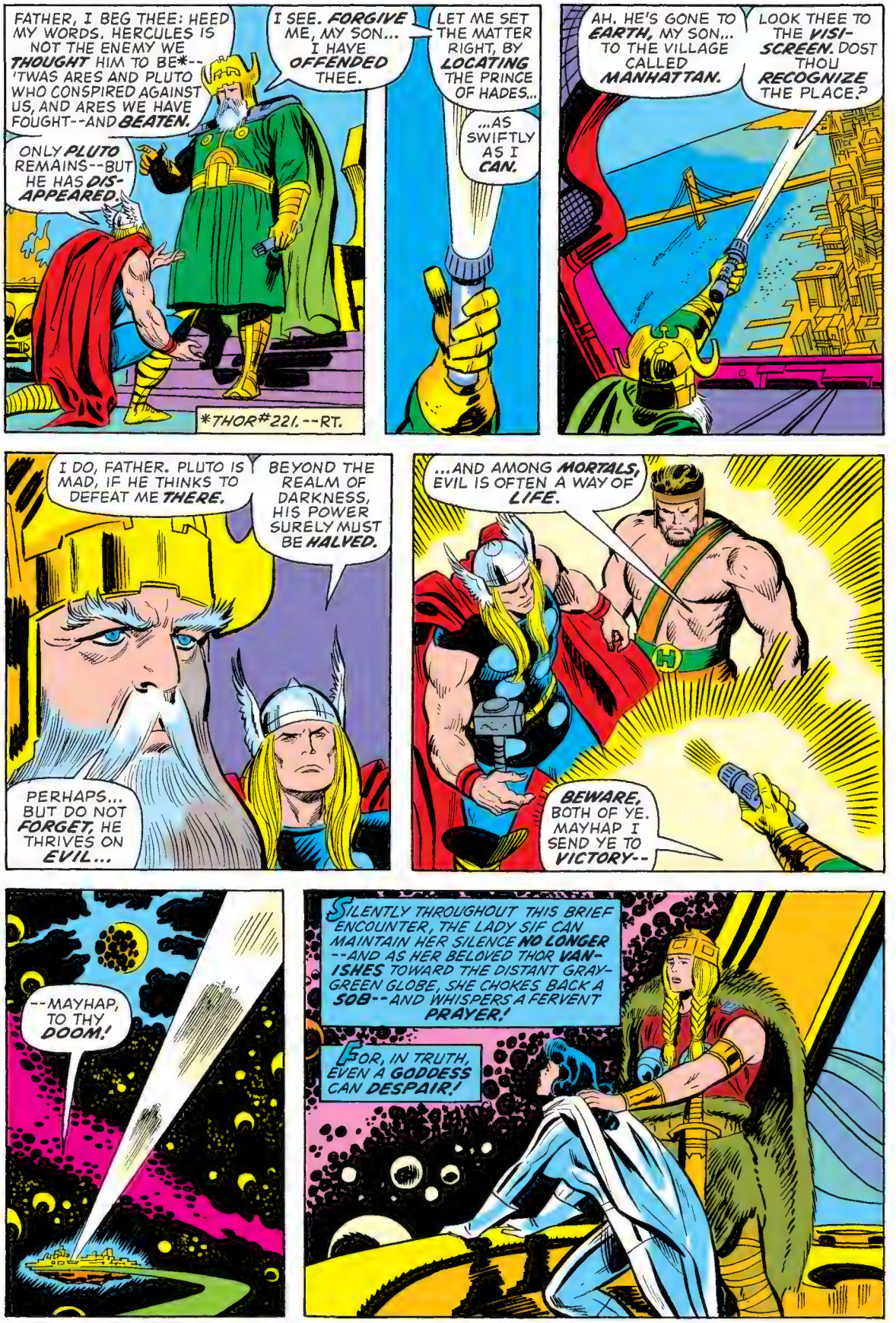
AND SO, SHORT SECONDS LATER, THE TWO GODLINGS STAND IN THE PRESENCE OF ODIN, LORD OF ASGARD, FATHER OF THE THUNDER GOD...YEA, ALL-FATHER SUPREME...

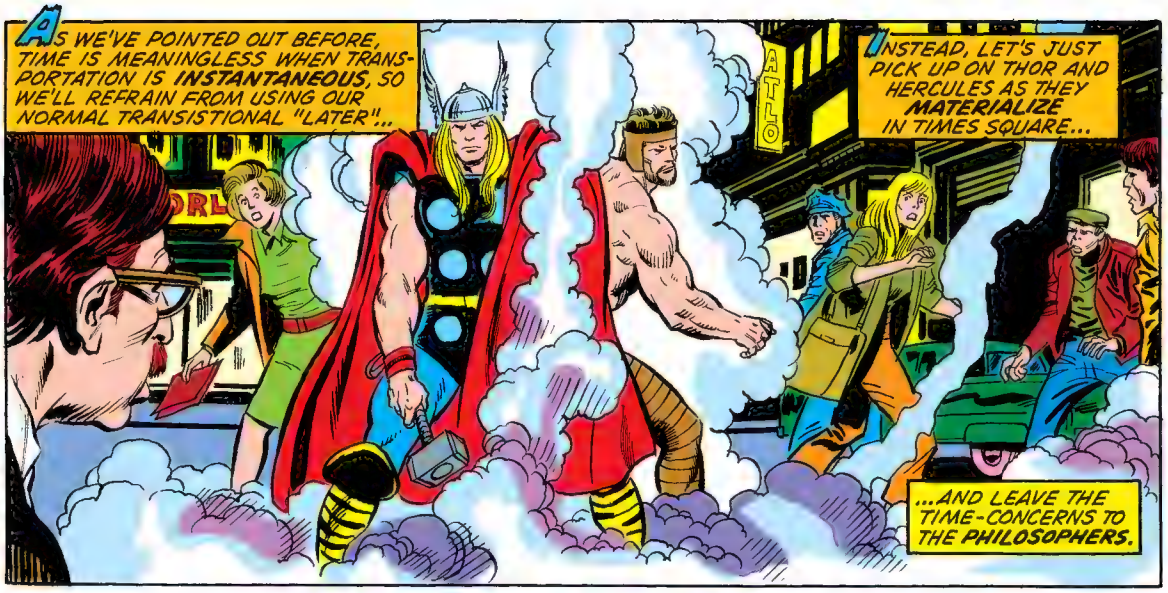
FATHER, I--

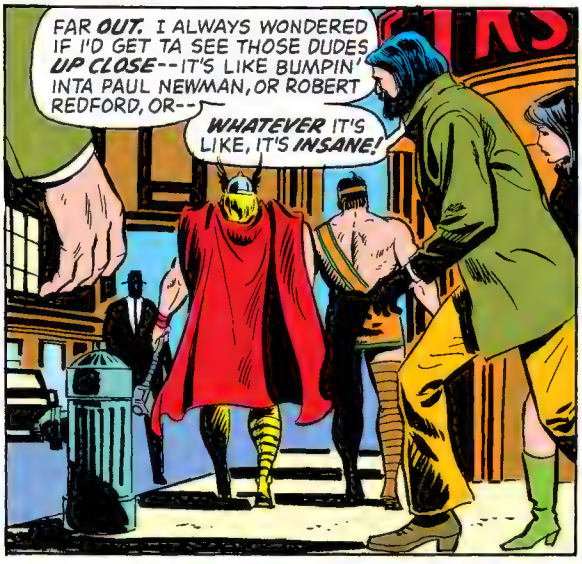
SILENCE! THOU HAST BETRAYED THY *HERITAGE!*

LIKE A TRAITOR MOST *FOUL,* THOU HAST BROUGHT AN ENEMY INTO THE *PRESENCE!*

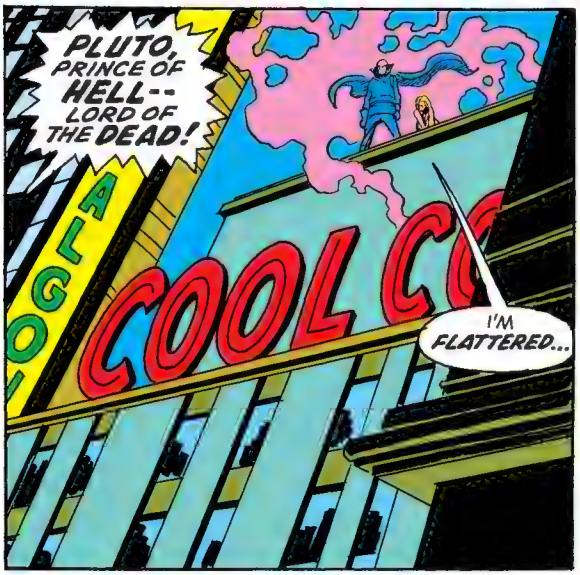
IN THE NAME OF MY ETERNAL *MAJESTY,* THIS SHALL NOT *BE!*


FATHER, I BEG THEE: HEED MY WORDS. HERCULES IS NOT THE ENEMY WE THOUGHT HIM TO BE*-- 'TWAS ARES AND PLUTO WHO CONSPIRED AGAINST US, AND ARES WE HAVE FOUGHT--AND BEATEN.
I SEE. FORGIVE ME, MY SON... I HAVE OFFENDED THEE.
LET ME SET THE MATTER RIGHT, BY LOCATING THE PRINCE OF HADES...
...AS SWIFTLY AS I CAN.
ONLY PLUTO REMAINS--BUT HE HAS DIS-APPEARED.
*THOR #221.--RT.
AH. HE'S GONE TO EARTH, MY SON... TO THE VILLAGE CALLED MANHATTAN.
LOOK THEE TO THE VISI-SCREEN. DOST THOU RECOGNIZE THE PLACE?
I DO, FATHER. PLUTO IS MAD, IF HE THINKS TO DEFEAT ME THERE.
BEYOND THE REALM OF DARKNESS, HIS POWER SURELY MUST BE HALVED.
PERHAPS... BUT DO NOT FORGET, HE THRIVES ON EVIL...
...AND AMONG MORTALS, EVIL IS OFTEN A WAY OF LIFE.
BEWARE, BOTH OF YE. MAYHAP I SEND YE TO VICTORY--
--MAYHAP, TO THY DOOM!
SILENTLY THROUGHOUT THIS BRIEF ENCOUNTER, THE LADY SIF CAN MAINTAIN HER SILENCE NO LONGER --AND AS HER BELOVED THOR VAN-ISHES TOWARD THE DISTANT GRAY-GREEN GLOBE, SHE CHOKES BACK A SOB--AND WHISPERS A FERVENT PRAYER!
FOR, IN TRUTH, EVEN A GODDESS CAN DESPAIR!


AS WE'VE POINTED OUT BEFORE, TIME IS MEANINGLESS WHEN TRANSPORTATION IS INSTANTANEOUS, SO WE'LL REFRAIN FROM USING OUR NORMAL TRANSISTIONAL "LATER"...
INSTEAD, LET'S JUST PICK UP ON THOR AND HERCULES AS THEY MATERIALIZE IN TIMES SQUARE...
...AND LEAVE THE TIME-CONCERNS TO THE PHILOSOPHERS.


FAR OUT. I ALWAYS WONDERED IF I'D GET TA SEE THOSE DUDES UP CLOSE--IT'S LIKE BUMPIN' INTA PAUL NEWMAN, OR ROBERT REDFORD, OR--
WHATEVER IT'S LIKE, IT'S INSANE!

THY FATHER SERVED US WELL, THOR.
WE NEED SEARCH NO FURTHER THAN THE BY-WAY AHEAD.
DOST THOU SEE HIM, ON YONDER BUILDING?

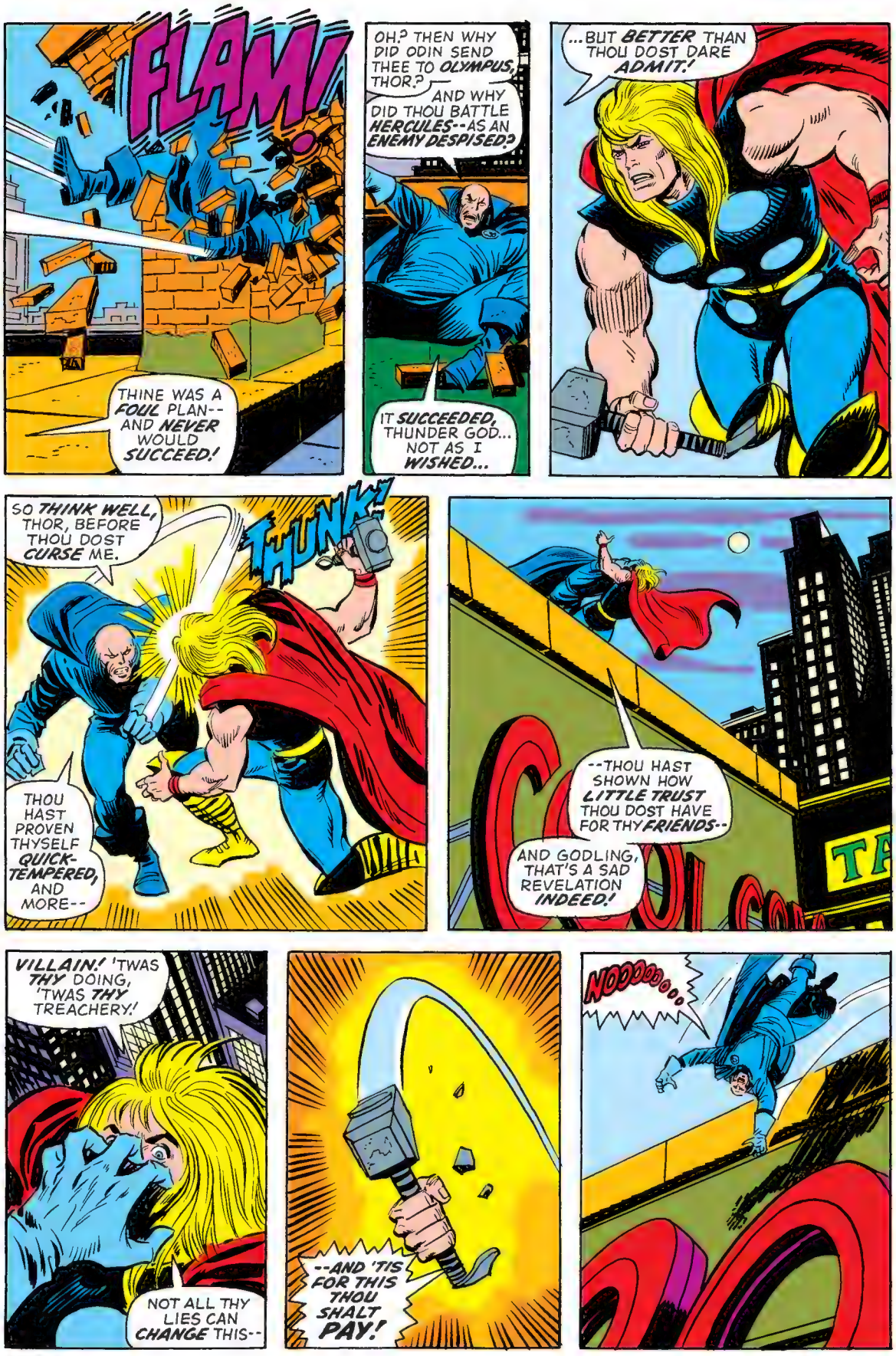

PLUTO, PRINCE OF HELL--LORD OF THE DEAD!
I'M FLATTERED...

...THAT SO LORDLY A PERSONAGE AS THE GOD OF THUNDER SHOULD FIND SOMETHING OF INTEREST IN THE LOWLY CARE-TAKER OF HADES!
CAN IT BE I HAVE SOMETHING THOU DOST WANT?
CAN IT BE THOU HAST COME TO SEIZE THIS OBJECT--LIKE A COMMON BRIGAND OR THIEF?
VERILY, THOU HAST NOT DISAPPOINTED ME, EITHER OF THEE... FOR I EXPECTED THIS BEHAVIOR...

...AND I AM NOT UNPREPARED!
BEHOLD, THE POWER OF PLUTO:
FROM THE AIR ITSELF, I CAN SHAPE A WEAPON FORMED OF HATE...
... A SPEAR OF FIRE, POSSESSING SOME UNUSUAL PROPERTIES...
...AYE, SOME MOST UNUSUAL PROPERTIES INDEED!
SPITTING OUT A LAUGH TINGED WITH INSANITY, THE DARK LORD HURLS THE THROBBING SPEAR OF FLAME--IT ARCS THROUGH THE COOL NIGHT AIR--
--AND STRIKES!
THUNDER GOD--MY SKIN'S ON FIRE! THE WORLD BURNS RED ABOUT ME--! I-I--
HERCULES!
HE STANDS IMMOBILE, HIS BODY PARALYZED! BY HEIMDAL'S EYES, THIS IS STARK MADNESS!
CAN EVEN THOR PREVAIL 'GAINST THIS SORCERY SUPREME?
WHAT POWER DO WE FACE, THAT CAN CREATE A SPELL SUCH AS THIS?
AYE!
THOUGH ONE HAS FALLEN, STILL ONE STANDS!
AND SO LONG AS ONE STANDS, THE BATTLE GOES ON--

--TILL THE DARK LORD'S DEATH-- OR THE END OF TIME!
A GRAY BOLT IN THE NIGHT, THE THUNDER GOD'S HAMMER FLIES UPWARD, STRAIGHT AND TRUE--
--AND WHEN IT CONNECTS, IT ABSORBS THE DEADLY FLAME OF PLUTO'S SECOND SPEAR OF FIRE--AND QUENCHING THAT FLAME--
--RETURNS.
THY SPELLS ARE NOT SO STRONG AS THEY APPEAR, PLUTO.
VERILY, THEY PROVE THEMSELVES A SHAM-- A MOCKERY-- WHEN CONFRONTED WITH THE MALLET OF THOR!
LET'S SEE HOW WELL THOU DOST STAND, WHEN SIMILARLY CONFRONTED--
--NOT BY THE MYSTIC MJOLNIR-- BUT BY THE SON OF ODIN--
--THE GOD OF THUNDER, THE MASTER OF THE WORLD'S WIND!
THY THREATS ARE WITHOUT SUBSTANCE, GODLING. THOU DOST SPEAK TO PLUTO, WHO RULES A WORLD, WHOSE WORD IS LAW...WHOSE THOUGHT IS POWER.
WHAT CARE I FOR THE PETTY PRONOUNCEMENTS OF THE SON OF ODIN? WHAT CARE I OF THEE-- WHO ART BUT AN ANT IN MINE EYES?
'TIS A QUESTION WORTH THE ASKING, PLUTO.
PERHAPS THOU SHOULD ANSWER IT--

--WHILE STILL THOU CAN BREATHE.
WHY HAST THOU CONCERNED THY-SELF WITH ASGARD, AND WITH ME? AND MORE--
WHY DID THOU KIDNAP THE MAIDEN KRISTA, SHE WHO HAS NEVER HARMED THEE--SHE WHO IS TRULY INNOCENT!
THERE ARE NO INNOCENTS, THOR. SHE WAS A PAWN, EVEN AS THOU ART... A PAWN IN A GAME I HAVE LOST.
I HOPED TO ANGER ODIN BY HER ABDUCTION--TO ENRAGE HIM, BY MAKING IT SEEM AS THOUGH HERCULES WERE MY ALLY.
--WAR, BETWEEN ASGARD AND OLYMPUS--
SKRAK!
--AND WHEN THAT WAR WAS DONE--
--AND THE GODS OF BOTH LANDS HAD DECIMATED EACH OTHER--
SWOOSH!
--ONLY PLUTO WOULD BE FIT TO RULE; ONLY PLUTO WOULD HAVE AN ARMY TO COMMAND--AND PLUTO WOULD TRIUMPH OVER THEM --AS I HAVE TRIUMPHED OVER THEE!
SPABOOM!
I SAY THEE NAY!


FLAM!
THINE WAS A FOUL PLAN-- AND NEVER WOULD SUCCEED!
OH? THEN WHY DID ODIN SEND THEE TO OLYMPUS, THOR?
AND WHY DID THOU BATTLE HERCULES--AS AN ENEMY DESPISED?
IT SUCCEEDED, THUNDER GOD... NOT AS I WISHED...
...BUT BETTER THAN THOU DOST DARE ADMIT!
SO THINK WELL, THOR, BEFORE THOU DOST CURSE ME.
THUNK!
THOU HAST PROVEN THYSELF QUICK-TEMPERED, AND MORE--
--THOU HAST SHOWN HOW LITTLE TRUST THOU DOST HAVE FOR THY FRIENDS--
AND GODLING, THAT'S A SAD REVELATION INDEED!
VILLAIN! 'TWAS THY DOING, 'TWAS THY TREACHERY!
NOT ALL THY LIES CAN CHANGE THIS--
--AND 'TIS FOR THIS THOU SHALT PAY!
NOOOOOOO...

ZLAKK!
VANISHED. I KNOW NOT HOW, BUT HE'S ESCAPED.
SUCH A FATE WOULD NOT DESTROY A GOD --ESPECIALLY PLUTO, LORD OF THE DEAD.
BUT, AS THOUGH IN ARGUMENT TO THE THUNDER GOD'S WORDS--
ZOUNDS! I CAN MOVE AGAIN-- THE SPELL'S BEEN BROKEN!
'TIS A MIRACLE!
NAY, NO MIRACLE, HERCULES. WITH PLUTO VANISHED, HIS SPELLS MUST VANISH ALSO.
STILL, I WAGER WE'LL MEET THE PRINCE OF HELL AGAIN--WHEN, I CANNOT SAY.
GULP
WHY WORRY, ASGARDIAN.? ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL, I SAY.
HOW FARES THY KIDNAPPED MAIDEN?
BY BIFROST'S GOLDEN SPAN! LOOK THEE...SHE LIES MOST STILL, HER BREATHING SHORT AND LABORED!
WHAT DOES IT MEAN, THOR? SHE IS NOT--?
SHE BE DYING, HERCULES, EVEN AS WE WATCH... THERE IS NO TIME TO RETURN HER TO ASGARD...
...WHAT MUST BE DONE, MUST BE DONE ON EARTH!
IF THE MAIDEN KRISTA IS TO SURVIVE, THOR MUST STAND ASIDE--
--THAT DOCTOR BLAKE MAY LIVE AGAIN!

NEXT ISSUE: AN OLD FRIEND RETURNS...AS WELL AS ONE OF THE THUNDER GOD'S MOST **DEADLY** FOES! YOU'LL HATE YOURSELF FOREVER, TRUE BELIEVER, IF YOU MISS...

NO ONE CAN STOP...THE DESTROYER!

THOR
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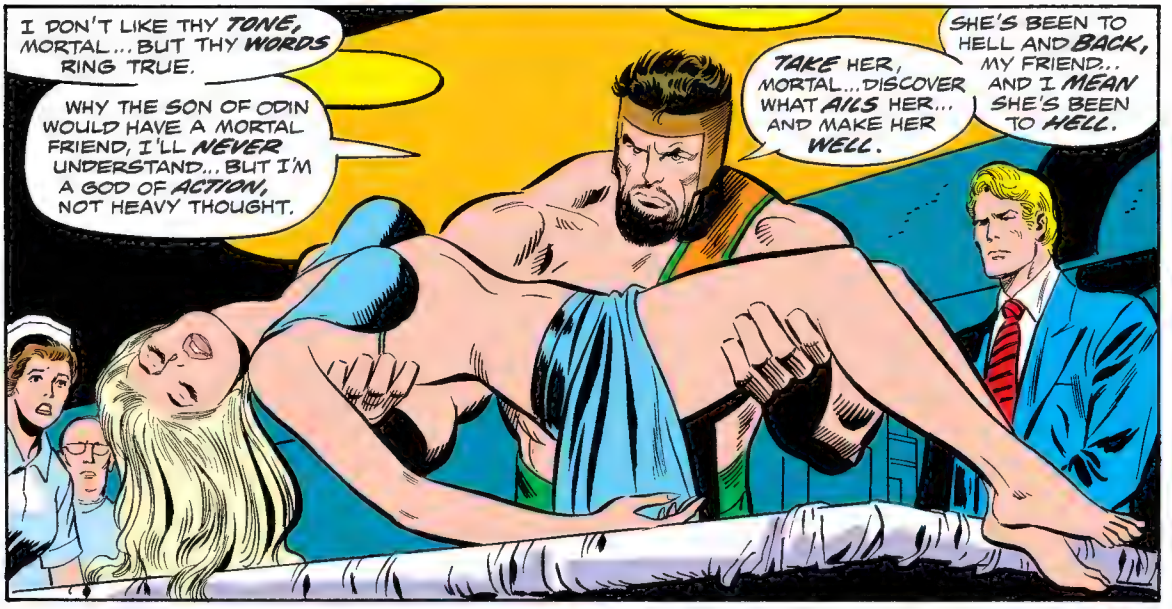
THE MIGHTY
THOR®
IF AN INHUMAN MONSTER CAN CRUSH HERCULES, PRINCE OF POWER--
-- CAN EVEN A THUNDER GOD PREVAIL AGAINST HIM??
THIS IS--THE DAY OF THE DESTROYER!

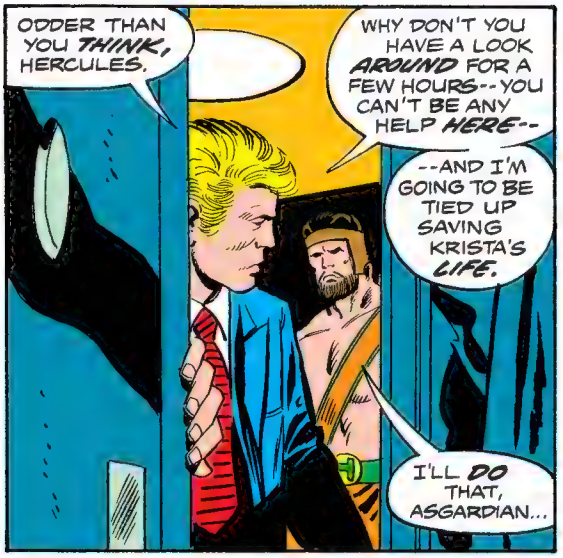
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE MIGHTY THOR! TM
GERRY CONWAY WRITER / JOHN BUSCEMA ARTIST / MIKE ESPOSITO INKER / JOHN COSTANZA letterer / G. ROUSSOS colorist / ROY THOMAS EDITOR
THEY CALL HIM THE GOD OF THUNDER, BUT SOMETIMES BEING A GOD ISN'T ENOUGH...
AS ANOTHER GOD DISCOVERED TWO THOUSAND YEARS AGO, A TIME COMES WHEN THE GOD MUST GIVE WAY TO THE MAN...
THIS IS ONE OF THOSE TIMES, FOR THOR, THE GOD OF THUNDER...
EMERGENCY
...WHO MUST BECOME DOCTOR DONALD BLAKE, THE MAN!
NO ONE CAN STOP...
THE DESTROYER!

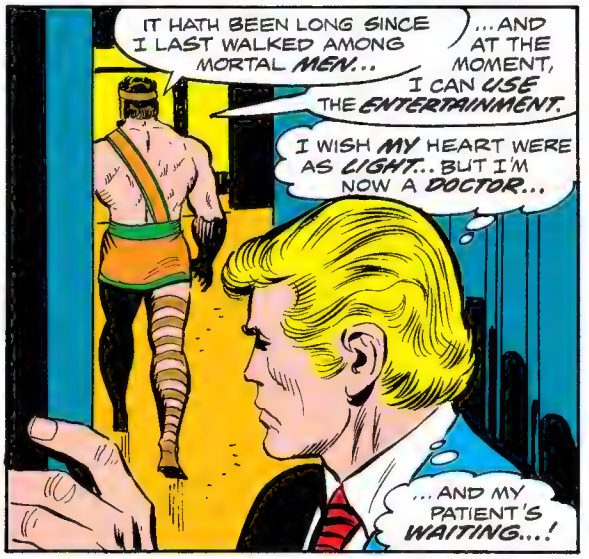
THOUGH HERCULES AND I RESCUED HER FROM PLUTO'S CLUTCHES,* THE YOUNG GODDESS KRISTA IS STILL IN DEADLY DANGER--HER BODY STRICKEN BY A TORMENT THE POWERS OF THOR ARE HELPLESS TO RELIEVE--
*SEE LAST ISH. --ROY.
--BUT WHICH THE SURGICAL SKILLS OF DONALD BLAKE MAY YET BRING UNDER CONTROL!
DONE. AFTER ALL THESE MONTHS, I'VE MADE THE TRANSFORM-ATION ONCE AGAIN...
...AND AS ALWAYS, I CAN'T HELP WONDERING... WHICH IS THE REAL ME? DON BLAKE...
...OR THE SON OF ODIN, THOR?
MEANWHILE, A FEW STEPS AWAY...
THOU SHALT NOT TOUCH HER, MORTAL! THE GIRL WAS GIVEN TO MY CARE, AND SHE'LL STAY IN MY CARE TILL THOR RETURNS!
GET THEE BACK, OR BY MY FATHER'S BEARD, I'LL--
HERCULES, NO!
WHO CALLS MY NAME? WHO DARES SAY NAY TO THE NOBLE SON OF ZEUS?
I DO, HERCULES.
THOR TOLD ME YOU WERE HOT-HEADED--
--BUT I WOULD'VE THOUGHT YOU'D HAVE SENSE ENOUGH TO RECOGNIZE HELP WHEN IT'S OFFERED!
BLAKE! GOOD LORD, MAN -- WE THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD!
I'VE BEEN... TRAVELING, DOCTOR.
WHERE IN HEAVEN'S NAME HAVE YOU BEEN ALL THESE MONTHS -- AND WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS MADMAN WHO CALLS HIMSELF HERCULES?
AS FOR HERCULES--
I'LL TAKE CHARGE OF KRISTA NOW. I'VE BEEN FULLY BRIEFED ON HER INJURY BY THOR.
THOR? THEN THE AGGARDIAN DID SEND THEE?
IN A WAY, WE'RE... OLD FRIENDS, HE AND I.

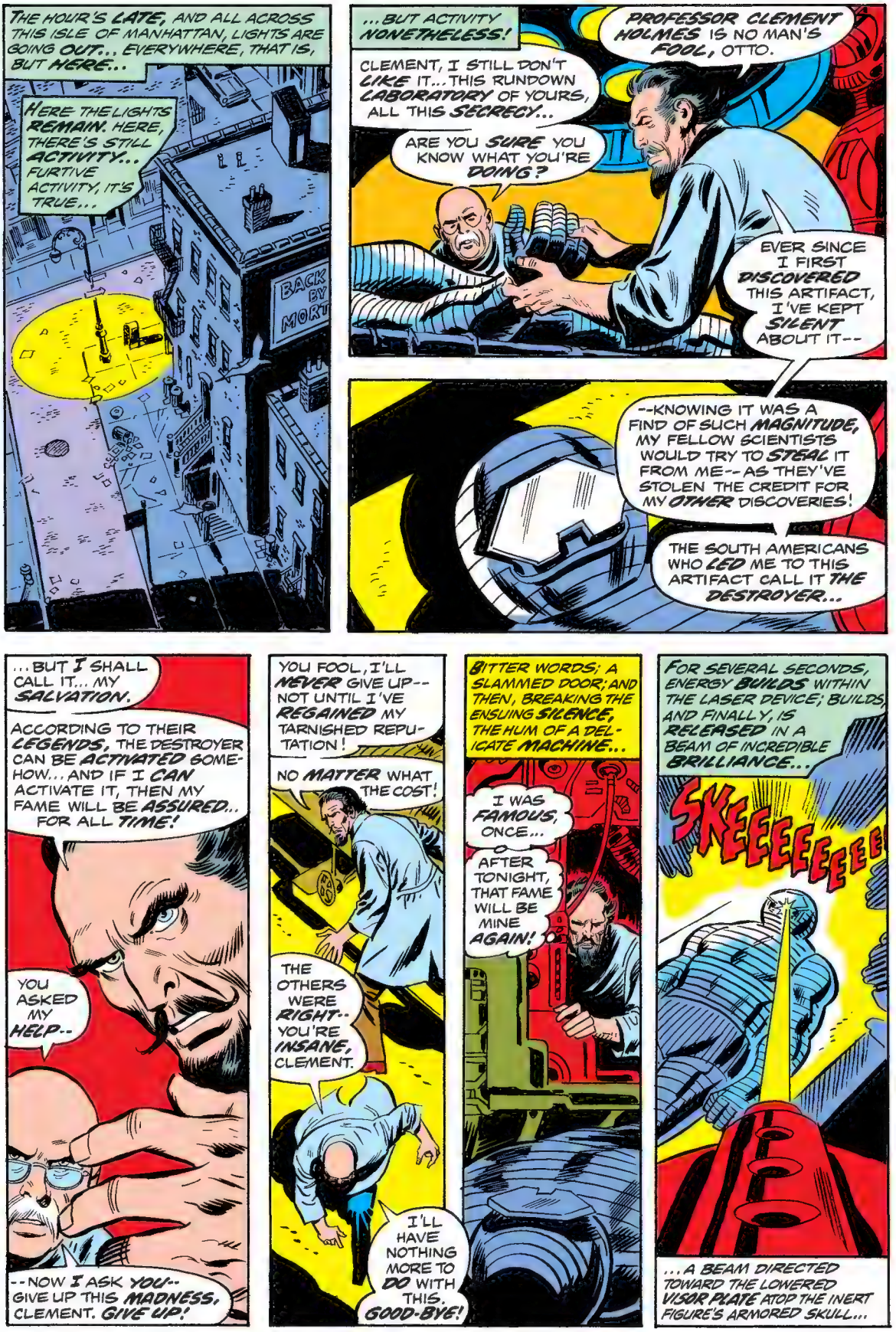

I DON'T LIKE THY TONE, MORTAL... BUT THY WORDS RING TRUE.
WHY THE SON OF ODIN WOULD HAVE A MORTAL FRIEND, I'LL NEVER UNDERSTAND... BUT I'M A GOD OF ACTION, NOT HEAVY THOUGHT.
TAKE HER, MORTAL... DISCOVER WHAT AILS HER... AND MAKE HER WELL.
SHE'S BEEN TO HELL AND BACK, MY FRIEND... AND I MEAN SHE'S BEEN TO HELL.

I'LL DO WHAT I CAN, OLYMPIAN.
KRISTA IS THE SISTER OF AN OLD FRIEND OF MINE...
...A FRIEND OF MY FIANCEE, TO BE PRECISE.
THY FIANCEE--?

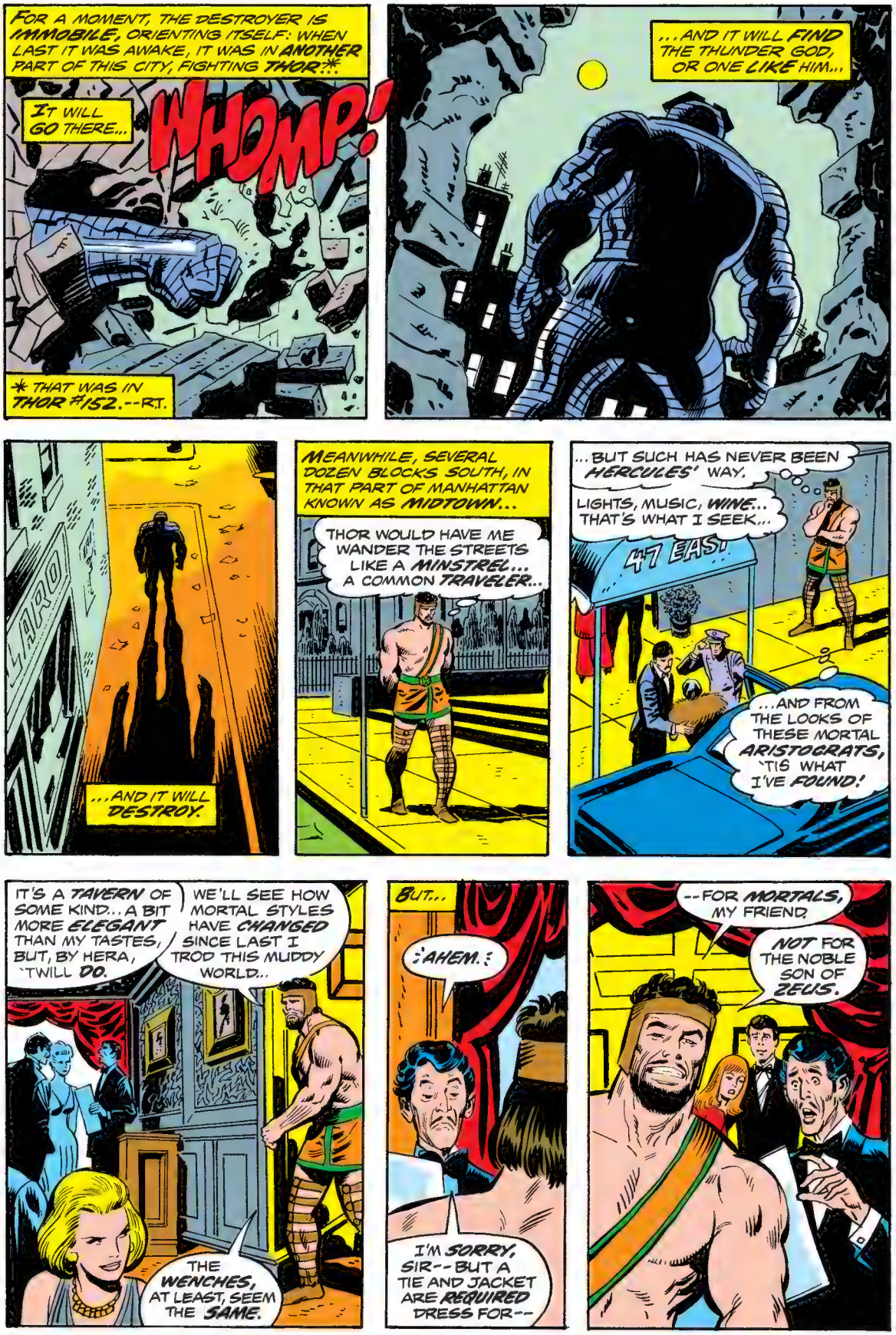
I THINK YOU'RE BEGINNING TO GET THE PICTURE.
I WON'T EXPLAIN NOW, BUT YES, I'M HE.
ZOUNDS! THIS WORLD GETS MORE AND MORE ODD, TH--I MEAN, MORTAL.


ODDER THAN YOU THINK, HERCULES.
WHY DON'T YOU HAVE A LOOK AROUND FOR A FEW HOURS--YOU CAN'T BE ANY HELP HERE--
--AND I'M GOING TO BE TIED UP SAVING KRISTA'S LIFE.
I'LL DO THAT, ASGARDIAN...

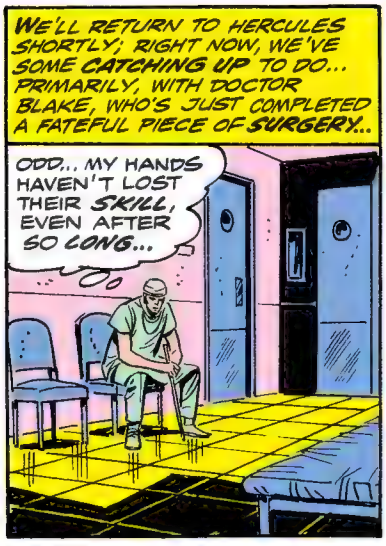

IT HATH BEEN LONG SINCE I LAST WALKED AMONG MORTAL MEN...
...AND AT THE MOMENT, I CAN USE THE ENTERTAINMENT.
I WISH MY HEART WERE AS LIGHT... BUT I'M NOW A DOCTOR...
...AND MY PATIENT'S WAITING...!


THE HOUR'S LATE, AND ALL ACROSS THIS ISLE OF MANHATTAN, LIGHTS ARE GOING OUT... EVERYWHERE, THAT IS, BUT HERE...
HERE THE LIGHTS REMAIN. HERE, THERE'S STILL ACTIVITY... FURTIVE ACTIVITY, IT'S TRUE...
BACK BY MORT
...BUT ACTIVITY NONETHELESS!
CLEMENT, I STILL DON'T LIKE IT... THIS RUNDOWN LABORATORY OF YOURS, ALL THIS SECRECY...
ARE YOU SURE YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING?
PROFESSOR CLEMENT HOLMES IS NO MAN'S FOOL, OTTO.
EVER SINCE I FIRST DISCOVERED THIS ARTIFACT, I'VE KEPT SILENT ABOUT IT--
--KNOWING IT WAS A FIND OF SUCH MAGNITUDE, MY FELLOW SCIENTISTS WOULD TRY TO STEAL IT FROM ME--AS THEY'VE STOLEN THE CREDIT FOR MY OTHER DISCOVERIES!
THE SOUTH AMERICANS WHO LED ME TO THIS ARTIFACT CALL IT THE DESTROYER...
...BUT I SHALL CALL IT... MY SALVATION.
ACCORDING TO THEIR LEGENDS, THE DESTROYER CAN BE ACTIVATED SOMEHOW... AND IF I CAN ACTIVATE IT, THEN MY FAME WILL BE ASSURED... FOR ALL TIME!
YOU ASKED MY HELP--
--NOW I ASK YOU-- GIVE UP THIS MADNESS, CLEMENT. GIVE UP!
YOU FOOL, I'LL NEVER GIVE UP-- NOT UNTIL I'VE REGAINED MY TARNISHED REPUTATION!
NO MATTER WHAT THE COST!
THE OTHERS WERE RIGHT-- YOU'RE INSANE, CLEMENT.
I'LL HAVE NOTHING MORE TO DO WITH THIS. GOOD-BYE!
BITTER WORDS; A SLAMMED DOOR; AND THEN, BREAKING THE ENSUING SILENCE, THE HUM OF A DELICATE MACHINE...
I WAS FAMOUS, ONCE...
AFTER TONIGHT, THAT FAME WILL BE MINE AGAIN!
FOR SEVERAL SECONDS, ENERGY BUILDS WITHIN THE LASER DEVICE; BUILDS, AND FINALLY, IS RELEASED IN A BEAM OF INCREDIBLE BRILLIANCE...
SKEEEEEEEEE
...A BEAM DIRECTED TOWARD THE LOWERED VISOR PLATE ATOP THE INERT FIGURE'S ARMORED SKULL...

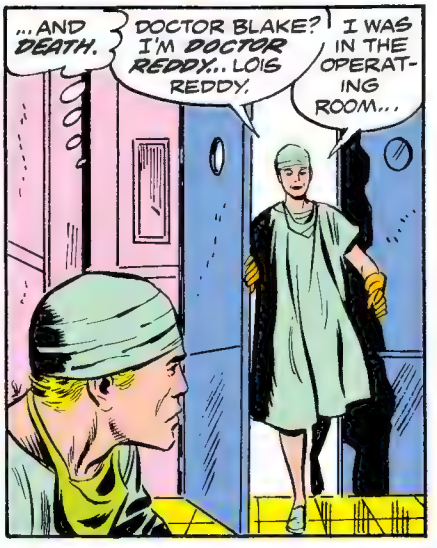
THE VISOR PLATE...
...WHICH ABRUPTLY LIFTS...
...AND BEGINS, WEIRDLY...
...TO GLOW.
LEGEND HAS IT THAT THE DESTROYER CAN BE ACTIVATED; THAT MUCH OF WHAT PROFESSOR HOLMES HAD LEARNED IS TRUE...
WHAT HE DIDN'T FIND OUT IS THIS: TO ACTIVATE THE DESTROYER, ONE MUST PROVIDE IT WITH AN ANIMATING FORCE... A LIFE ENERGY... OTHERWISE KNOWN AS... A MAN'S SOUL!
THREE TIMES BEFORE HAS THE DESTROYER BEEN GIVEN LIFE, AND EACH TIME IT BECAME MORE DIFFICULT TO DEFEAT HIM, FOR IN SOME UNCANNY WAY-- THE DE-STOYER SEEMED TO LEARN FROM EACH ACTIVATION---
--AND BECOME STRONGER ON EACH SUBSEQUENT WAKING!
SUCH IS THE CASE NOW, AS THE DESTROYER RISES FROM THE TABLE ON WHICH IT HAD LAIN MOMENTS BEFORE...
...AND THE NOW-SOULLESS BODY OF PROFESSOR CLEMENT HOLMES CRUMPLES TO THE LAB FLOOR...
...IN A STATE AKIN TO, BUT NOT QUITE...DEATH!

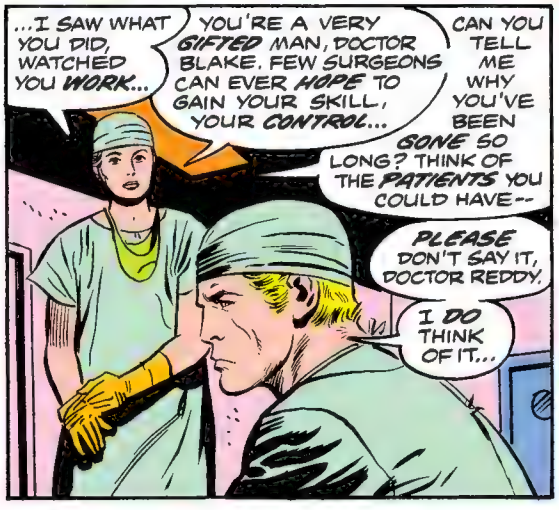

FOR A MOMENT, THE DESTROYER IS IMMOBILE, ORIENTING ITSELF: WHEN LAST IT WAS AWAKE, IT WAS IN ANOTHER PART OF THIS CITY, FIGHTING THOR.*
IT WILL GO THERE...
WHOMP!
* THAT WAS IN THOR #152.--R.T.
...AND IT WILL FIND THE THUNDER GOD, OR ONE LIKE HIM...
...AND IT WILL DESTROY.
MEANWHILE, SEVERAL DOZEN BLOCKS SOUTH, IN THAT PART OF MANHATTAN KNOWN AS MIDTOWN...
THOR WOULD HAVE ME WANDER THE STREETS LIKE A MINSTREL... A COMMON TRAVELER...
...BUT SUCH HAS NEVER BEEN HERCULES' WAY.
LIGHTS, MUSIC, WINE... THAT'S WHAT I SEEK...
47 EAST
...AND FROM THE LOOKS OF THESE MORTAL ARISTOCRATS, 'TIS WHAT I'VE FOUND!
IT'S A TAVERN OF SOME KIND... A BIT MORE ELEGANT THAN MY TASTES, BUT, BY HERA, 'TWILL DO.
WE'LL SEE HOW MORTAL STYLES HAVE CHANGED SINCE LAST I TROD THIS MUDDY WORLD...
THE WENCHES, AT LEAST, SEEM THE SAME.
BUT...
:AHEM.:
I'M SORRY, SIR--BUT A TIE AND JACKET ARE REQUIRED DRESS FOR--
--FOR MORTALS, MY FRIEND.
NOT FOR THE NOBLE SON OF ZEUS.

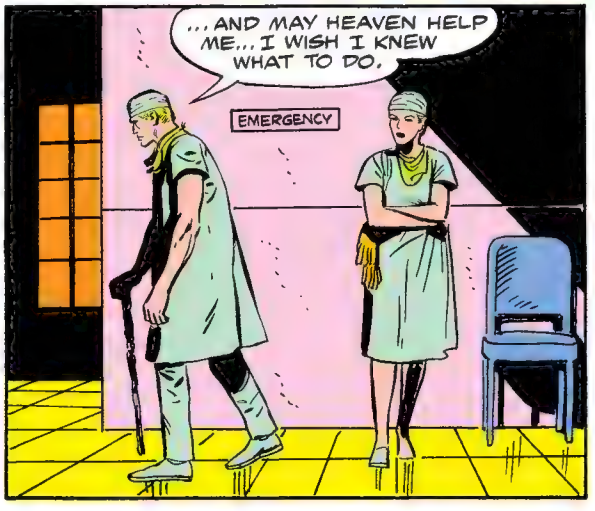
AH, NOW THIS IS A BREW TO EQUAL THE WINES OF OLYMPUS! BRING ME ANOTHER, SLAVE... AND A LARGER GOBLET AS WELL.
THIS IS A NIGHT FOR DRINK AND SONG, AND THOUGH THE VOICE OF YONDER WENCH DOTH NOT EQUAL THE QUALITY OF THIS WINE--
--BY HERA, 'TWILL DO!

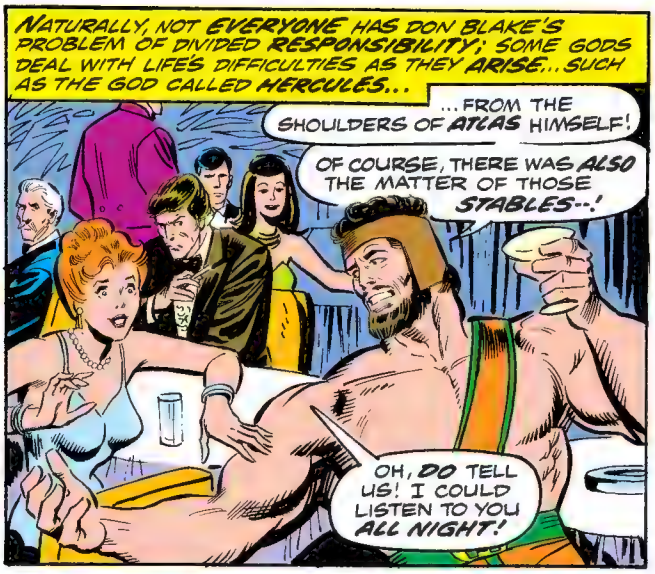

WE'LL RETURN TO HERCULES SHORTLY; RIGHT NOW, WE'VE SOME CATCHING UP TO DO... PRIMARILY, WITH DOCTOR BLAKE, WHO'S JUST COMPLETED A FATEFUL PIECE OF SURGERY...
ODD... MY HANDS HAVEN'T LOST THEIR SKILL, EVEN AFTER SO LONG...

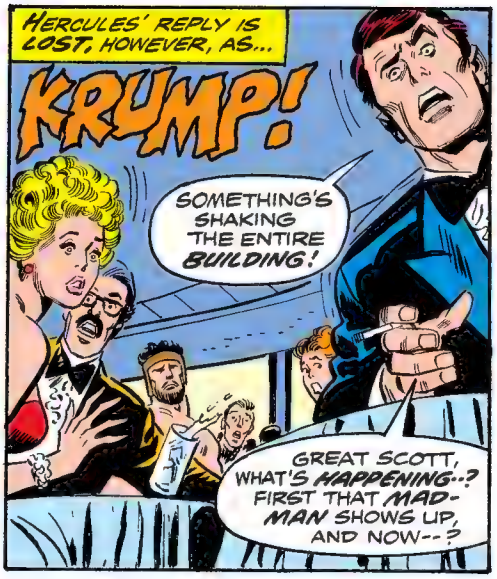
...AND BECAUSE OF THAT, KRISTA WILL LIVE. IT MAKES ONE THINK, DOESN'T IT?
MY HANDS WERE ALL THAT STOOD BETWEEN HER...


...AND DEATH.
DOCTOR BLAKE? I'M DOCTOR REDDY... LOIS REDDY.
I WAS IN THE OPERATING ROOM...


...I SAW WHAT YOU DID, WATCHED YOU WORK...
YOU'RE A VERY GIFTED MAN, DOCTOR BLAKE. FEW SURGEONS CAN EVER HOPE TO GAIN YOUR SKILL, YOUR CONTROL...
CAN YOU TELL ME WHY YOU'VE BEEN GONE SO LONG? THINK OF THE PATIENTS YOU COULD HAVE--
PLEASE DON'T SAY IT, DOCTOR REDDY.
I DO THINK OF IT...


...AND MAY HEAVEN HELP ME... I WISH I KNEW WHAT TO DO.
EMERGENCY

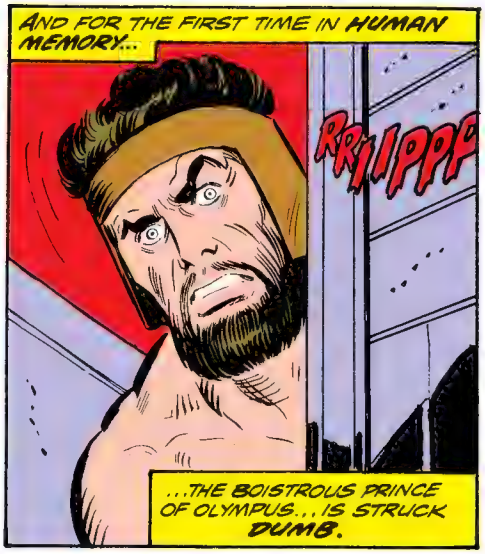

NATURALLY, NOT EVERYONE HAS DON BLAKE'S PROBLEM OF DIVIDED RESPONSIBILITY; SOME GODS DEAL WITH LIFE'S DIFFICULTIES AS THEY ARISE... SUCH AS THE GOD CALLED HERCULES...
...FROM THE SHOULDERS OF ATLAS HIMSELF!
OF COURSE, THERE WAS ALSO THE MATTER OF THOSE STABLES--!
OH, DO TELL US! I COULD LISTEN TO YOU ALL NIGHT!


HERCULES' REPLY IS LOST, HOWEVER, AS...
KRUMP!
SOMETHING'S SHAKING THE ENTIRE BUILDING!
GREAT SCOTT, WHAT'S HAPPENING--? FIRST THAT MAD-MAN SHOWS UP, AND NOW--?

RUMBLE!
GOOD LORD! IT'S GETTING WORSE-- LIKE A BULL-DOZER'S OUT THERE!
HOLD, MORTALS!
WE'LL ALL BE KILLED!
THOU DOST FORGET-- HERCULES DOTH STAND AMONG THEE!

GET THEE BACK, WITLING.
WE'LL SEE WHO DARES DISTURB MY FEAST, ZOUNDS, I'LL--

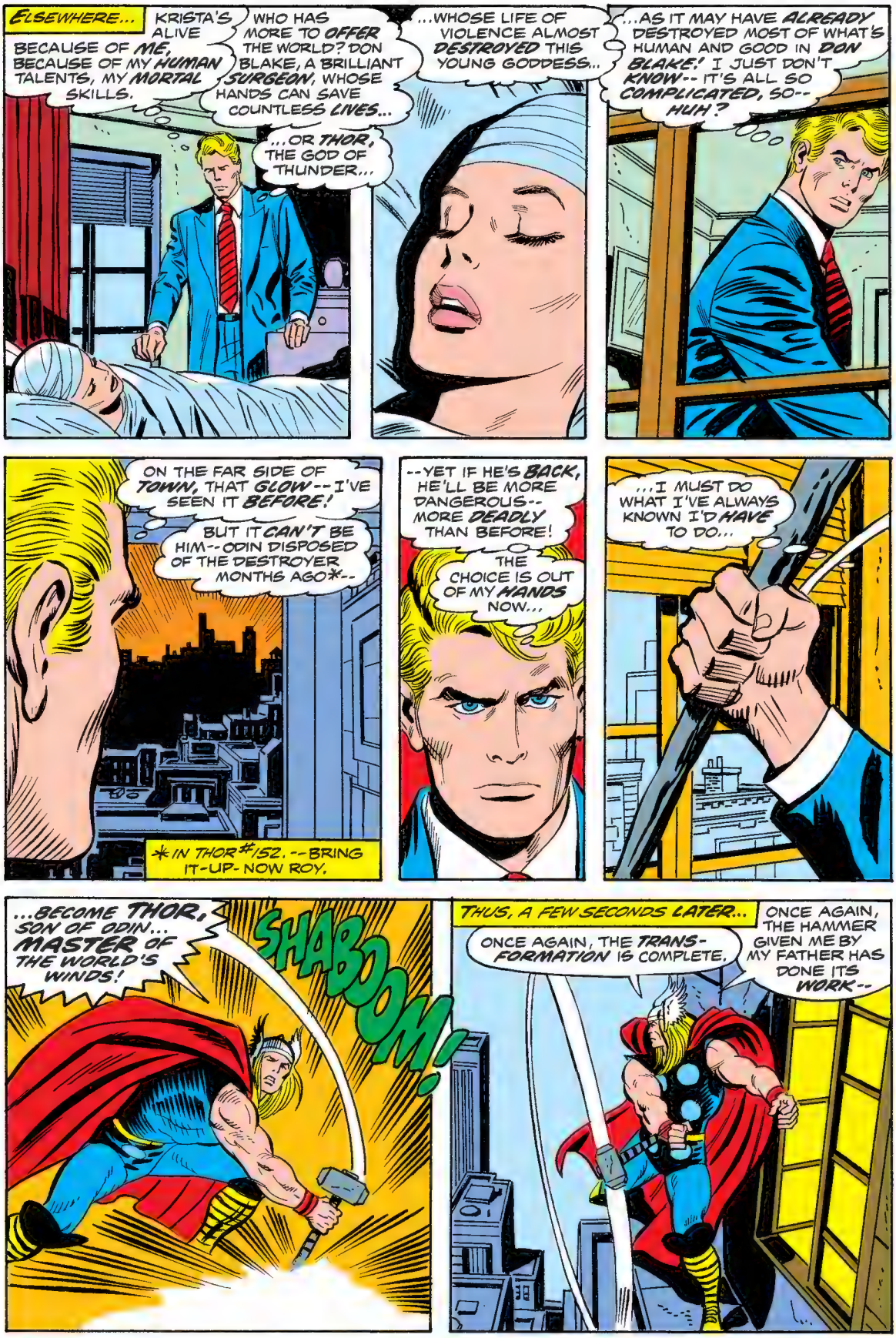
KRASH!
EEEEEEEE!

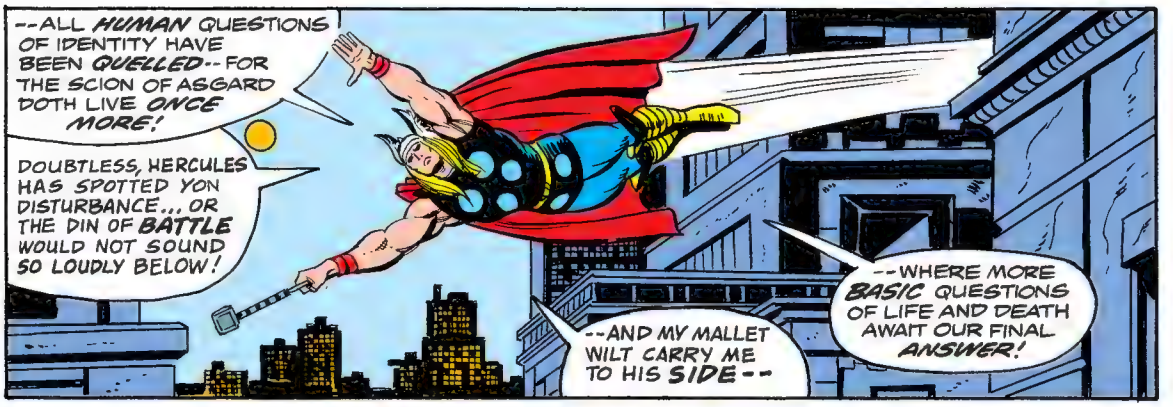

AND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HUMAN MEMORY...
RRIIPPP
...THE BOISTROUS PRINCE OF OLYMPUS... IS STRUCK DUMB.

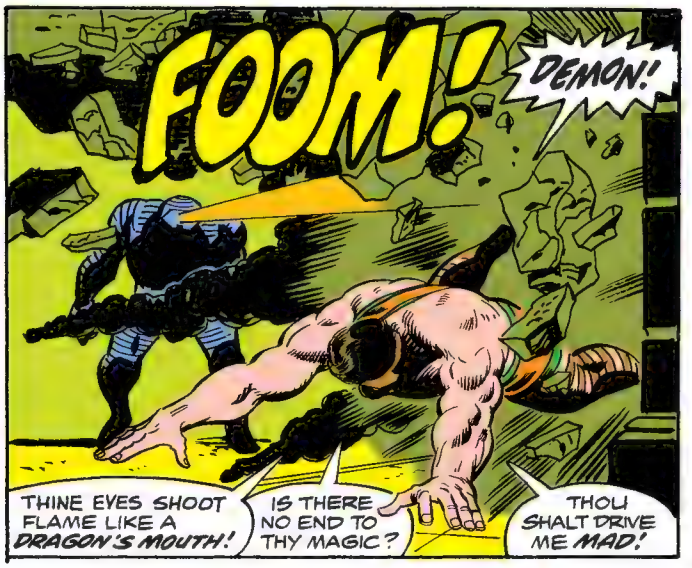
RRIIPPP
KRASH!
BY THE STAFF OF MY FATHER, HOLD!
(CASUAL ASIDE TO JOLTIN' JIM STARLIN AND CAPTAIN MARVEL, RE: THE DESTROYER: WE HAD THE NAME FIRST, GUYS! HOOHAH! -- MERRY GERRY, JOLLY JOHNNY, and THOR.)

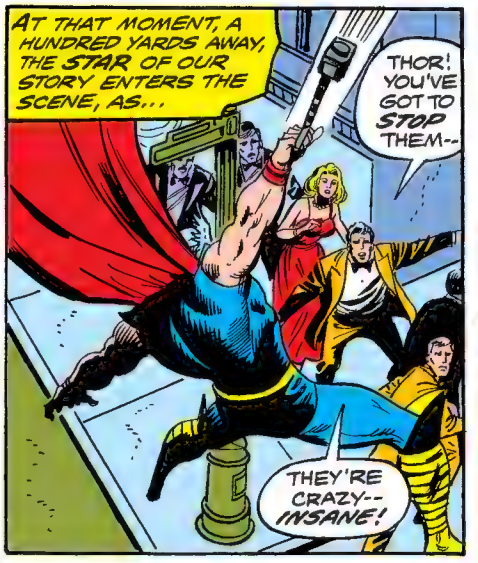
I KNOW NOT THY NAME, VARLET, BUT THINE INTENTION IS PLAIN.
IF THOU DOST SEEK A FIGHT, THEN IN THE NAME OF OLYMPUS-- AND BY THE BELT ABOUT MY LOINS--
--THOU SHALT HAVE THY BATTLE--SO!
SPOW!
WHAT? AFTER SUCH A BLOW, THOU STILL CAN STAND?
THOU ART A WORTHY FOE, SILENT ONE--
--BUT YONDER MORTALS DEPEND ON ME FOR THEIR PROTECTION, AND THOUGH I'VE NO LOVE FOR THEIR ARROGANT WAYS, THEY'RE A CHARMING BREED--
--AND SO I'LL DEFEND THEM, WITH ONE FINAL--EH?
FATHER ZEUS!
THOU DOST LIFT ME LIKE A BABE!
WHAT SORCERY IS THIS? ART THOU A WIZARD-- A GOD?
ANSWER ME!
BUT THE DESTROYER GIVES NO ANSWER--

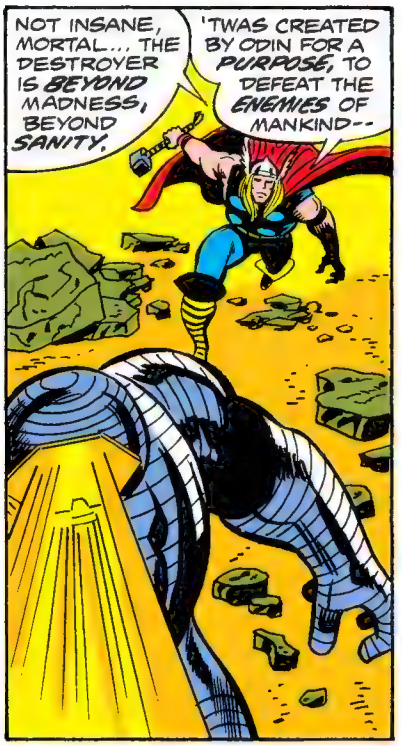
AT LEAST, NOT A VERBAL ANSWER...
...BUT AN ANSWER OF SORTS, NONETHELESS!
BY MERCURY..
NOOOOOOO
KHOOM!
VILLAIN, THOU HAST GONE TOO FAR!
I HAVE MY PRIDE... AND NOW, I'LL HAVE MY REVENGE!
BUT, EVEN AS HERCULES SPEAKS...
...THE DESTROYER'S VISOR LOWERS, SHUTTING WITH A SNAP ACROSS ITS ARMORED GRID...
... AND SLOWLY BEGINS TO GLOW..
...BUILDING TO CRITICAL MASS!


ELSEWHERE...
KRISTA'S ALIVE BECAUSE OF ME, BECAUSE OF MY HUMAN TALENTS, MY MORTAL SKILLS.
WHO HAS MORE TO OFFER THE WORLD? DON BLAKE, A BRILLIANT SURGEON, WHOSE HANDS CAN SAVE COUNTLESS LIVES...
...OR THOR, THE GOD OF THUNDER...
...WHOSE LIFE OF VIOLENCE ALMOST DESTROYED THIS YOUNG GODDESS..
...AS IT MAY HAVE ALREADY DESTROYED MOST OF WHAT'S HUMAN AND GOOD IN DON BLAKE! I JUST DON'T KNOW-- IT'S ALL SO COMPLICATED, SO-- HUH?
ON THE FAR SIDE OF TOWN, THAT GLOW-- I'VE SEEN IT BEFORE!
BUT IT CAN'T BE HIM--ODIN DISPOSED OF THE DESTROYER MONTHS AGO*--
*IN THOR #152, --BRING IT-UP- NOW ROY.
--YET IF HE'S BACK, HE'LL BE MORE DANGEROUS-- MORE DEADLY THAN BEFORE!
THE CHOICE IS OUT OF MY HANDS NOW...
...I MUST DO WHAT I'VE ALWAYS KNOWN I'D HAVE TO DO...
...BECOME THOR, SON OF ODIN... MASTER OF THE WORLD'S WINDS!
SHABOOM!
THUS, A FEW SECONDS LATER...
ONCE AGAIN, THE TRANS-FORMATION IS COMPLETE.
ONCE AGAIN, THE HAMMER GIVEN ME BY MY FATHER HAS DONE ITS WORK--

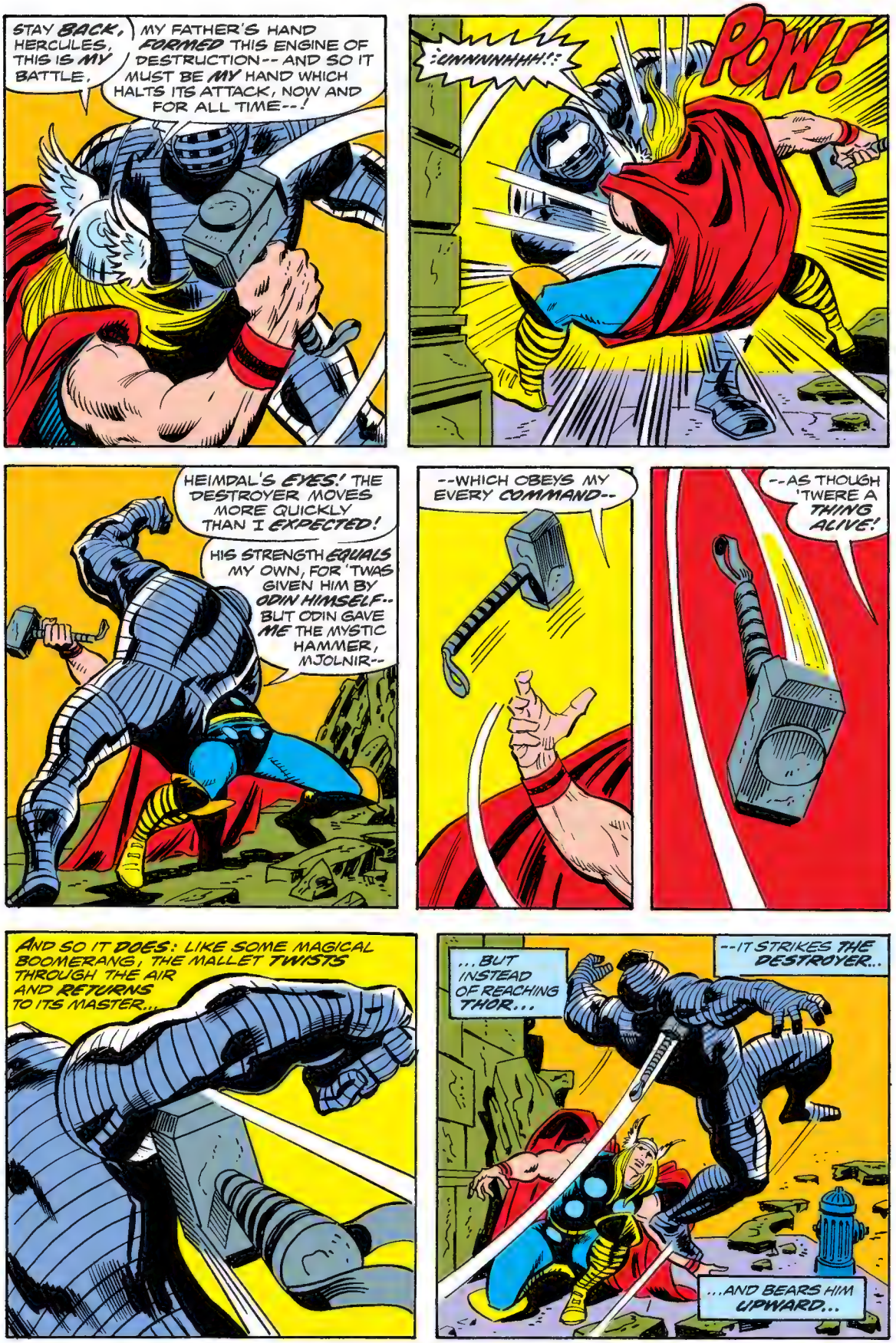

--ALL HUMAN QUESTIONS OF IDENTITY HAVE BEEN QUELLED--FOR THE SCION OF ASGARD DOTH LIVE ONCE MORE!
DOUBTLESS, HERCULES HAS SPOTTED YON DISTURBANCE... OR THE DIN OF BATTLE WOULD NOT SOUND SO LOUDLY BELOW!
--AND MY MALLET WILT CARRY ME TO HIS SIDE--
--WHERE MORE BASIC QUESTIONS OF LIFE AND DEATH AWAIT OUR FINAL ANSWER!

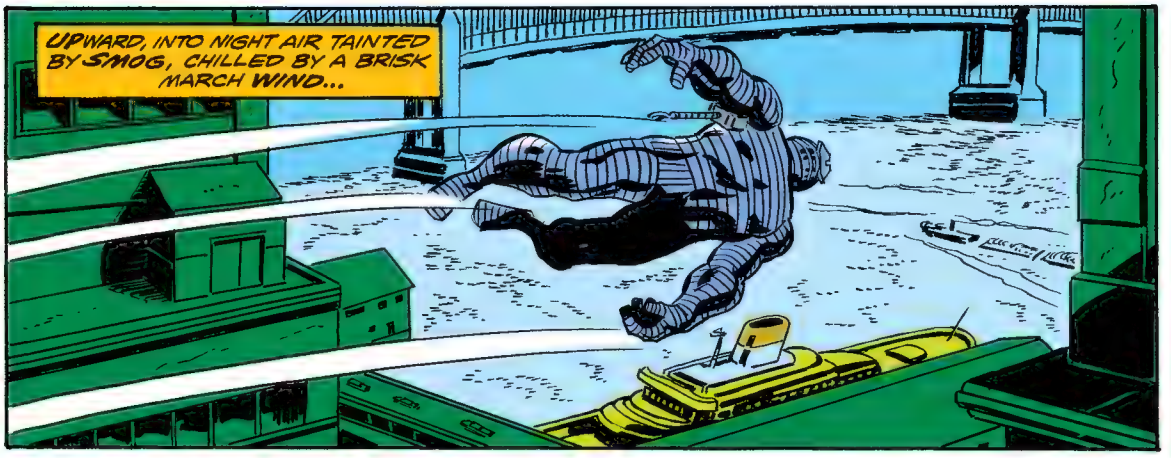

FOOM!
DEMON!
THINE EYES SHOOT FLAME LIKE A DRAGON'S MOUTH!
IS THERE NO END TO THY MAGIC?
THOU SHALT DRIVE ME MAD!


AT THAT MOMENT, A HUNDRED YARDS AWAY, THE STAR OF OUR STORY ENTERS THE SCENE, AS...
THOR! YOU'VE GOT TO STOP THEM--
THEY'RE CRAZY--INSANE!


NOT INSANE, MORTAL... THE DESTROYER IS BEYOND MADNESS, BEYOND SANITY.
'TWAS CREATED BY ODIN FOR A PURPOSE, TO DEFEAT THE ENEMIES OF MANKIND--

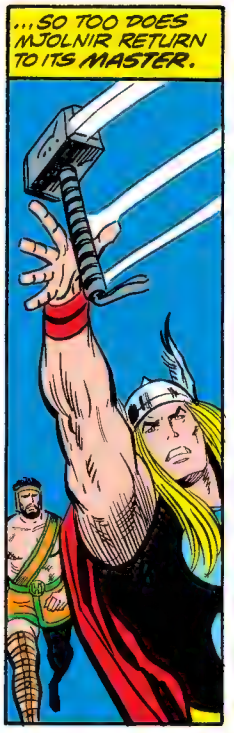
--BUT THREE TIMES HAS THAT PURPOSE BEEN PERVERTED; THREE TIMES HAS THE DESTROYER BEEN AWAKENED BEFORE HIS HOUR HAD COME--
--AND THREE TIMES HAVE I FACED HIM--TO DO WHAT MUST BE DONE!
TURN, DESTROYER! HE WHOM THOU DOST SEEK--HATH COME!
WHAM!

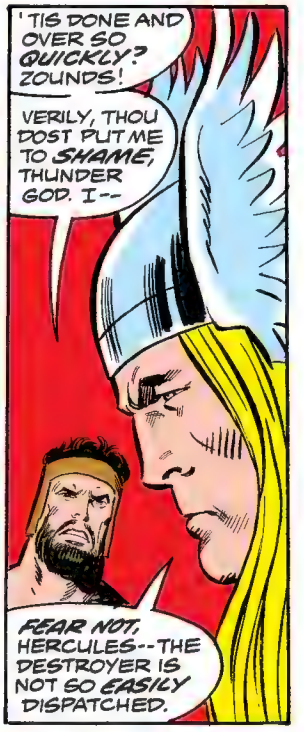

STAY BACK, HERCULES, THIS IS MY BATTLE.
MY FATHER'S HAND FORMED THIS ENGINE OF DESTRUCTION-- AND SO IT MUST BE MY HAND WHICH HALTS ITS ATTACK, NOW AND FOR ALL TIME--!
:UNNNNHHH!:
POW!
HEIMDAL'S EYES! THE DESTROYER MOVES MORE QUICKLY THAN I EXPECTED!
HIS STRENGTH EQUALS MY OWN, FOR 'TWAS GIVEN HIM BY ODIN HIMSELF-- BUT ODIN GAVE ME THE MYSTIC HAMMER, MJOLNIR--
--WHICH OBEYS MY EVERY COMMAND--
--AS THOUGH 'TWERE A THING ALIVE!
AND SO IT DOES: LIKE SOME MAGICAL BOOMERANG, THE MALLET TWISTS THROUGH THE AIR AND RETURNS TO ITS MASTER...
...BUT INSTEAD OF REACHING THOR...
--IT STRIKES THE DESTROYER...
...AND BEARS HIM UPWARD...

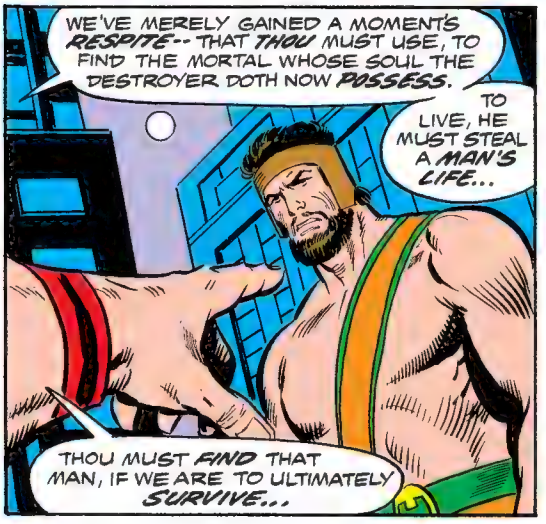

UPWARD, INTO NIGHT AIR TAINTED BY SMOG, CHILLED BY A BRISK MARCH WIND...

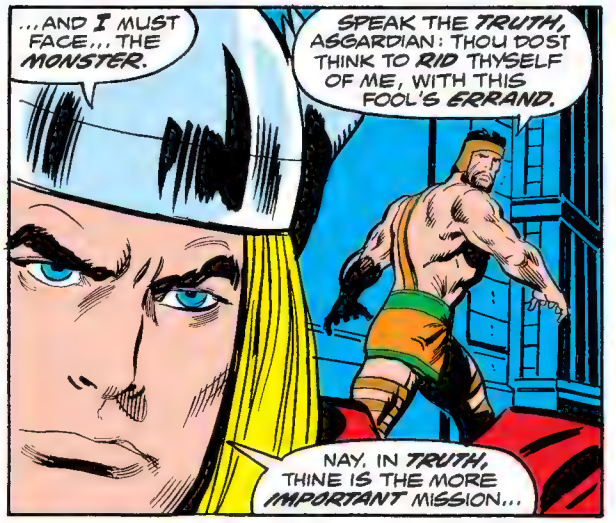
UPWARD...
OVER...
AND DOWN!
SPLASH!

THEN, AS A BIRD RETURNS TO ITS ROOST..


...SO TOO DOES MJOLNIR RETURN TO ITS MASTER.


'TIS DONE AND OVER SO QUICKLY? ZOUNDS!
VERILY, THOU DOST PUT ME TO SHAME, THUNDER GOD. I--
FEAR NOT, HERCULES--THE DESTROYER IS NOT SO EASILY DISPATCHED.


WE'VE MERELY GAINED A MOMENT'S RESPITE-- THAT THOU MUST USE, TO FIND THE MORTAL WHOSE SOUL THE DESTROYER DOTH NOW POSSESS.
TO LIVE, HE MUST STEAL A MAN'S LIFE...
THOU MUST FIND THAT MAN, IF WE ARE TO ULTIMATELY SURVIVE...


...AND I MUST FACE... THE MONSTER.
SPEAK THE TRUTH, ASGARDIAN: THOU DOST THINK TO RID THYSELF OF ME, WITH THIS FOOL'S ERRAND.
NAY, IN TRUTH, THINE IS THE MORE IMPORTANT MISSION...

"... FOR, AGAINST ONE SUCH AS THE DESTROYER, NEITHER THEE NOR I MAY HOPE TO PREVAIL!"
AND SO, TEN MINUTES LATER...
WHOMP!
WHAT HO, VILLAIN!
HE WHOM THOU DOST SEEK IS HERE--
--THOU NEED SEARCH NO FURTHER--
--THE MOMENT FOR OUR MEETING IS UPON US!
KLANG!
THEY CLASH, AS THE TITANS OF OLD MUST HAVE CLASHED--
--AND FOR MANY LONG MINUTES, THEIR BATTLE RAGES IN THE DARKNESS--
A HOPELESS BATTLE, AS THOR KNOWS...
...FOR NO ONE CAN STOP... THE DESTROYER!
YET STILL, HE FIGHTS ON...
HE CAN DO NO LESS...

...FOR HE WAS BORN THE GOD OF THUNDER!

SUDDENLY, AS THOR DRAWS BACK MOMENTARILY-- TRAGEDY STRIKES, WHEN--

MY HAMMER! OF ALL THE CREATURES OF LEGEND, ONLY THOU HAS THE STRENGTH TO WREST IT FROM MY GRASP--!

BY ODIN, THIS SHALL NOT BE! I'LL NOT--

KRAK!

UNNH!

ONLY A SECOND PASSES, AS THE NOBLE THOR REELS FROM THE DESTROYER'S MIGHTIEST BLOW... YET IT IS A FATEFUL SECOND... PERHAPS A FATAL ONE AS WELL, FOR...

ODIN'S BLOOD!

IN SIXTY SECONDS, WITHOUT MY HAMMER TO HOLD ME TO THIS FORM, I SHALL BECOME DONALD BLAKE ONCE MORE--

--A MORTAL, HELPLESS TO DEFEND MYSELF--

AND THOR WILL BE DESTROYED!

NEXT ISSUE: THE STORY WE CALL DEATHBLOW!

THOR
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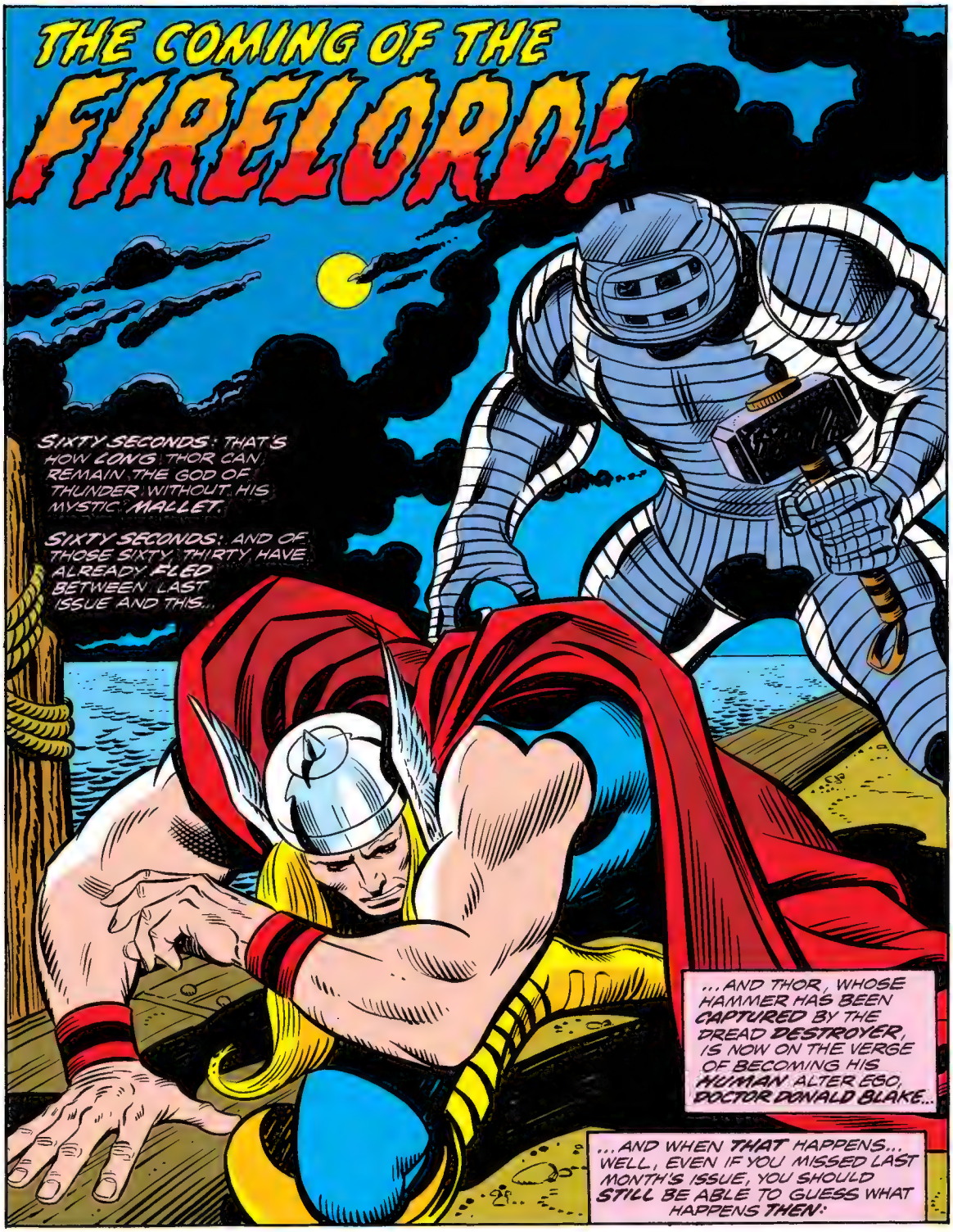
THE MIGHTY
THOR
MAKE WAY, UNDERLINGS! MAKE WAY FOR THE HERALD OF GALACTUS!
GALACTUS? SURELY, THEN-- THE EARTH IS DOOMED!!
UNLESS WE TWO CAN DEFEAT THE MENACE CALLED--
FIRELORD!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE MIGHTY THOR! TM

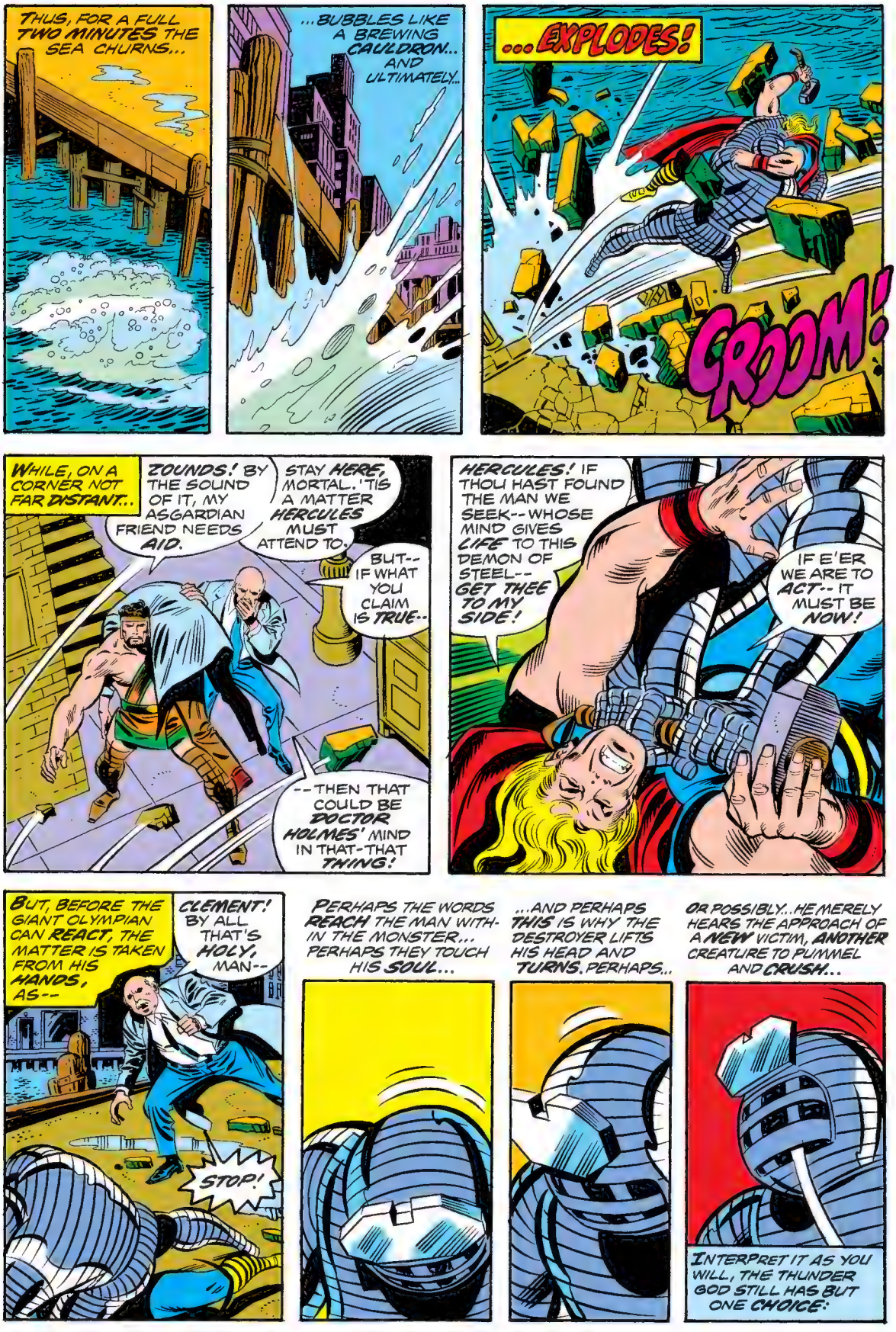
GERRY CONWAY / WRITER | JOHN BUSCEMA & JOE SINNOTT / ARTISTS | JOHN COSTANZA, letterer / GLYNIS WEIN, colorist | ROY THOMAS / EDITOR

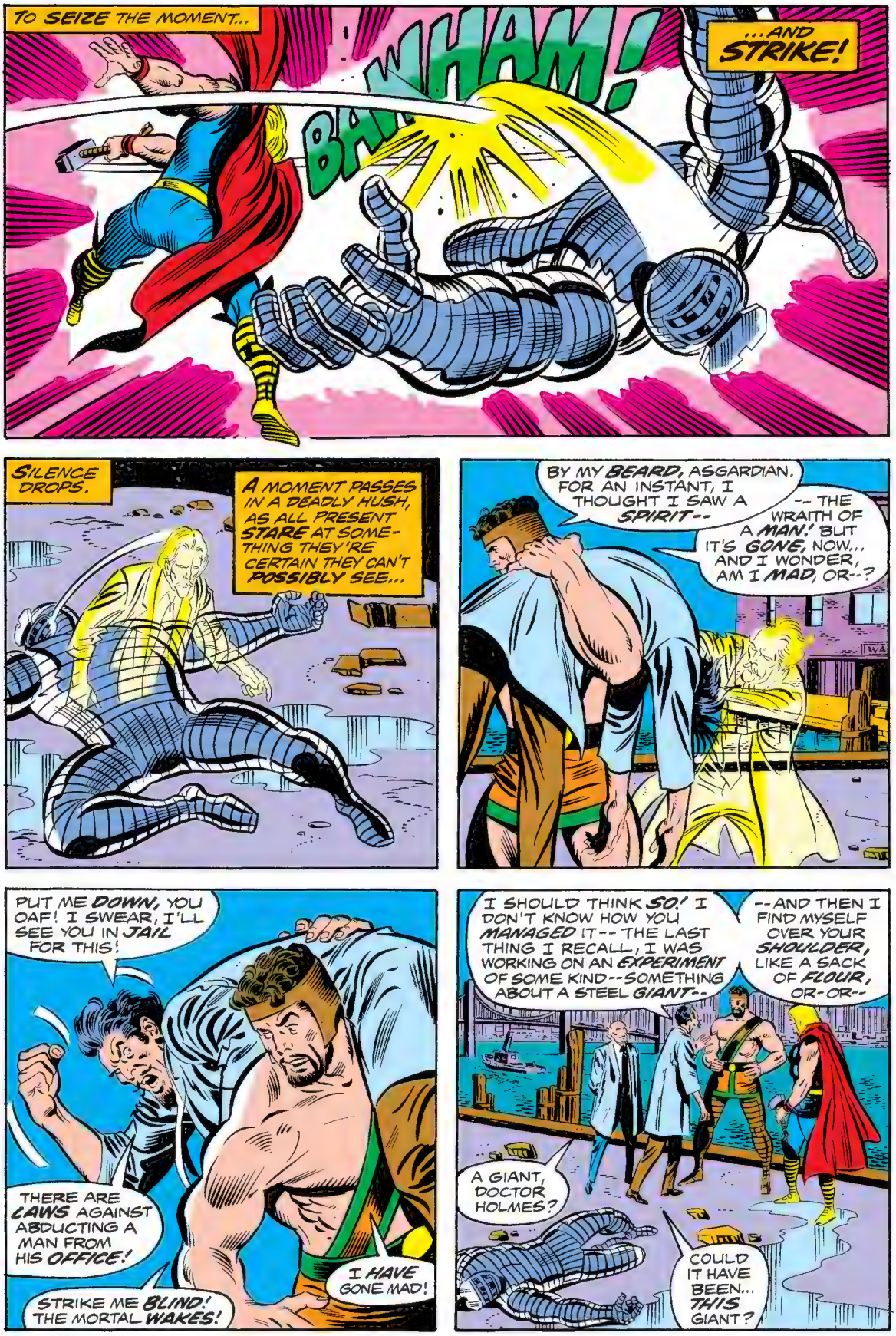
THE COMING OF THE FIRELORD!


SIXTY SECONDS: THAT'S HOW LONG THOR CAN REMAIN THE GOD OF THUNDER WITHOUT HIS MYSTIC MALLET.
SIXTY SECONDS: AND OF THOSE SIXTY, THIRTY HAVE ALREADY FLED BETWEEN LAST ISSUE AND THIS...
...AND THOR, WHOSE HAMMER HAS BEEN CAPTURED BY THE DREAD DESTROYER, IS NOW ON THE VERGE OF BECOMING HIS HUMAN ALTER EGO, DOCTOR DONALD BLAKE...
...AND WHEN THAT HAPPENS... WELL, EVEN IF YOU MISSED LAST MONTH'S ISSUE, YOU SHOULD STILL BE ABLE TO GUESS WHAT HAPPENS THEN:

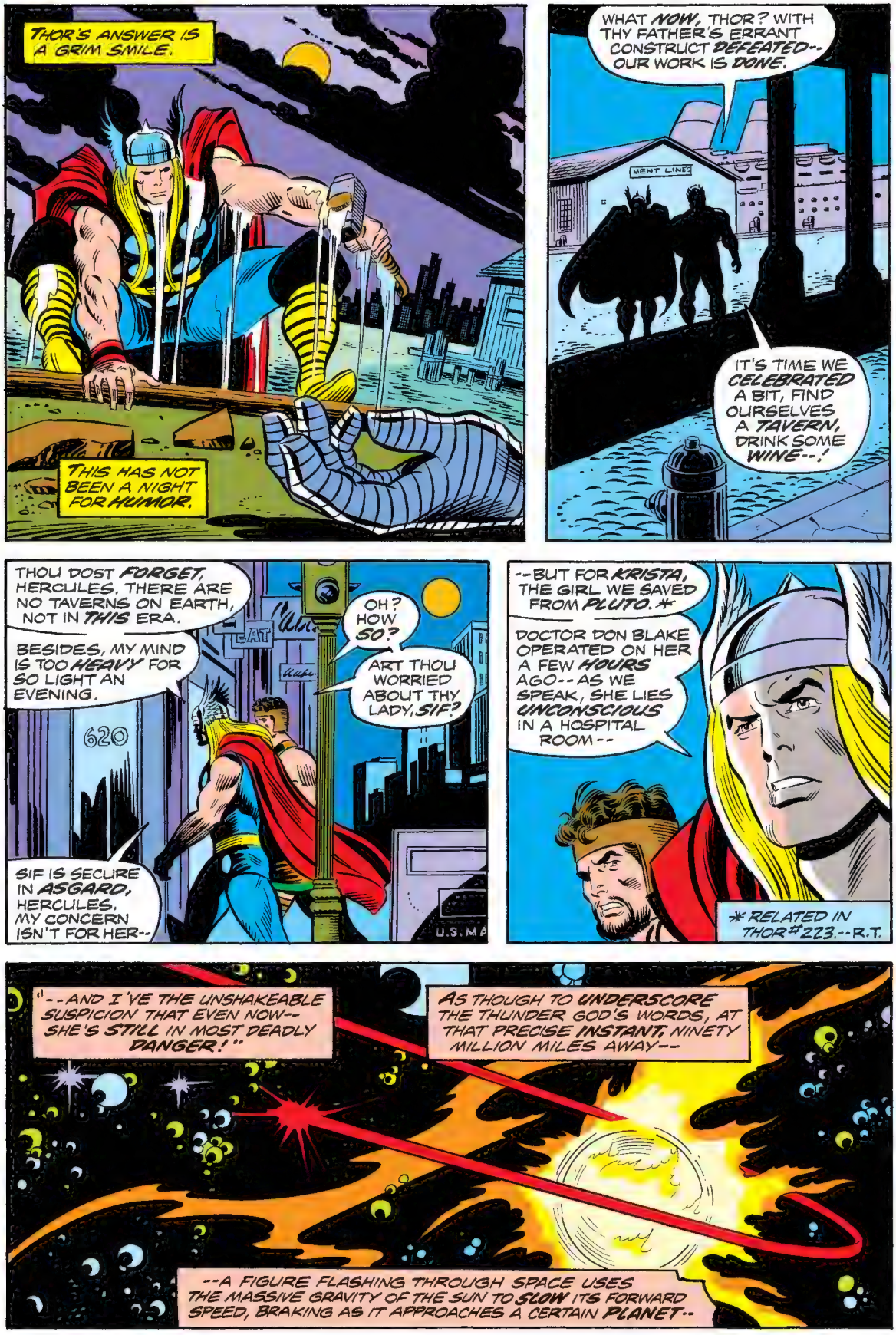
TO WIT: THE DEATH OF THE GOD OF THUNDER!
THE BATTLE IS OVER, AND I AM LOST...
...FOR EVEN AS I LIFT MYSELF, AND RECOVER FROM THE DESTROYER'S MOST POWERFUL BLOW...
...HE PREPARES TO DELIVER HIS CRUSHING OPTI-BLAST!
IN MERE SECONDS, I SHALL BECOME THE MORTAL DON BLAKE--
--AND SUCH A BLAST WILL SURELY DESTROY ME!
THE VISOR BEGINS TO LOWER-- THE POWER WITHIN HIM, BUILOS!
IF EVER I AM TO STRIKE BACK, IT MUST BE NOW--
--WHILE HIS THOUGHTS ARE ELSEWHERE, WHILE HIS WILL IS DRAINED!
TO ME, MJOLNIR! RETURN TO HIM WHO IS THY MASTER--
IN THE NAME OF THE ALL-FATHER, I COMMAND THEE--
RETURN!
TEN SECONDS REMAINING: AND THE DESTROYER FEELS A TUG ON THE HAMMER IN HIS HAND...
HE STRAINS TO RETAIN HIS GRIP, BUT HIS ATTENTION HAS WANDERED..
...AND WITH IT, HIS CHANCE FOR UNCHALLENGED VICTORY!
NOW, VILLAIN, NO LONGER DOST THOU FACE A GOD WHOSE STRENGTH IS HALVED.
THOU DOST SEE BEFORE THEE THE SON OF ODIN, THE MASTER OF THE WORLD'S WINDS--

--THOR, THE LIVING GOD OF THUNDER!
SPAM!
SO HARD DID I STRIKE HIM, HE FELL FROM THIS CRUMBLING WHARF--
--INTO YON BRINEY HARBOR!
WHERE HE GOES, I MUST FOLLOW--
--TO PLAY OUT THE FINAL ACT OF THIS GRIM AND DEADLY DRAMA!
AND SO, FOR THE THIRD TIME THIS FATEFUL EVE, THEY MEET IN MORTAL COMBAT: THE SCION OF ASGARD, AND ASGARD'S MOST VIOLENT CREATION--
TWUMP!
--FOR IT WAS ODIN WHO CAST THE DESTROYER'S MOLD--
--ODIN WHO HID THE UNTHINKING CONSTRUCT IN A SOUTH AMERICAN JUNGLE, THERE TO AWAIT THE DAY OF RAGNAROK, WHEN THE DESTROYER WOULD BE CALLED TO PROTECT THE FAVORED PEOPLE OF EARTH.
FOMPH!
AS WITH ALL PLANS, THIS PLAN HAS GONE AWRY--
--AND INSTEAD OF SERVING, THE DESTROYER ATTACKS -- FOR HE HAS BEEN AWAKENED BEFORE HIS TIME, BY A SCIENTIST SEEKING TO REVIVE A FLAGGING REPUTATION--!*
* SHOWN LAST ISH.--ROY.


THUS, FOR A FULL TWO MINUTES THE SEA CHURNS...
...BUBBLES LIKE A BREWING CAULDRON... AND ULTIMATELY...
...EXPLODES!
CROOM!
WHILE, ON A CORNER NOT FAR DISTANT..
ZOUNDS! BY THE SOUND OF IT, MY ASGARDIAN FRIEND NEEDS AID.
STAY HERE, MORTAL. 'TIS A MATTER HERCULES MUST ATTEND TO.
BUT-- IF WHAT YOU CLAIM IS TRUE--
--THEN THAT COULD BE DOCTOR HOLMES' MIND IN THAT-THAT THING!
HERCULES! IF THOU HAST FOUND THE MAN WE SEEK-- WHOSE MIND GIVES LIFE TO THIS DEMON OF STEEL-- GET THEE TO MY SIDE!
IF E'ER WE ARE TO ACT-- IT MUST BE NOW!
BUT, BEFORE THE GIANT OLYMPIAN CAN REACT, THE MATTER IS TAKEN FROM HIS HANDS, AS--
CLEMENT! BY ALL THAT'S HOLY, MAN--
STOP!
PERHAPS THE WORDS REACH THE MAN WITHIN THE MONSTER... PERHAPS THEY TOUCH HIS SOUL...
...AND PERHAPS THIS IS WHY THE DESTROYER LIFTS HIS HEAD AND TURNS. PERHAPS...
OR POSSIBLY.. HE MERELY HEARS THE APPROACH OF A NEW VICTIM, ANOTHER CREATURE TO PUMMEL AND CRUSH...
INTERPRET IT AS YOU WILL, THE THUNDER GOD STILL HAS BUT ONE CHOICE:


TO SEIZE THE MOMENT...
WHAM!
...AND STRIKE!
SILENCE DROPS.
A MOMENT PASSES IN A DEADLY HUSH, AS ALL PRESENT STARE AT SOMETHING THEY'RE CERTAIN THEY CAN'T POSSIBLY SEE...
BY MY BEARD, ASGARDIAN. FOR AN INSTANT, I THOUGHT I SAW A SPIRIT--
-- THE WRAITH OF A MAN! BUT IT'S GONE, NOW... AND I WONDER, AM I MAD, OR--?
PUT ME DOWN, YOU OAF! I SWEAR, I'LL SEE YOU IN JAIL FOR THIS!
THERE ARE LAWS AGAINST ABDUCTING A MAN FROM HIS OFFICE!
STRIKE ME BLIND! THE MORTAL WAKES!
I HAVE GONE MAD!
I SHOULD THINK SO! I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU MANAGED IT -- THE LAST THING I RECALL, I WAS WORKING ON AN EXPERIMENT OF SOME KIND--SOMETHING ABOUT A STEEL GIANT--
--AND THEN I FIND MYSELF OVER YOUR SHOULDER, LIKE A SACK OF FLOUR, OR-OR--
A GIANT, DOCTOR HOLMES?
COULD IT HAVE BEEN... THIS GIANT?

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, OTTO? WHAT DO YOU MEAN, THIS--
OH, GOD.
I REMEMBER IT NOW, ALL OF IT.
IT WAS A NIGHT-MARE... COULDN'T CONTROL MYSELF, COULDN'T STOP THE VIOLENCE...!
HEAVEN HELP ME... WHAT HAVE I DONE?
COME, CLEMENT.
YOU NEED REST...
HILDA AND I WILL LOOK AFTER YOU FOR A FEW DAYS.
THEN, WHEN YOU'RE FEELING WELL AGAIN...
...WE'LL TALK.
AN END; AND FOR DOCTOR CLEMENT HOLMES... A BEGINNING.
BUT, FOR HERCULES...
THOR? WHERE IN THE NAME OF ZEUS...?
OVER HERE, OLYMPIAN.
THE BATTLE DONE, I WENT TO RETRIEVE-- THIS.
THUNDER GOD, THOU DOST AMAZE ME.
WHY, BECAUSE I'VE AN ATTACHMENT TO THIS HELMET? MIND THEE, IT WAS A GIFT FROM MY FATHER--
--MY FIRST WAR HELMET, GIVEN ME WHEN I WAS STILL AN ADOLESCENT.
DOES SUCH SENTIMENTALITY SURPRISE THEE?
NAY.
ONLY THAT THOU WOULD HAVE THE POOR TASTE TO WEAR THE UGLY THING.
KEEP IT, YES--
BUT IN THE NAME OF MERCY, KEEP IT IN A DARK PLACE.


THOR'S ANSWER IS A GRIM SMILE.
THIS HAS NOT BEEN A NIGHT FOR HUMOR.
WHAT NOW, THOR? WITH THY FATHER'S ERRANT CONSTRUCT DEFEATED--OUR WORK IS DONE.
IT'S TIME WE CELEBRATED A BIT, FIND OURSELVES A TAVERN, DRINK SOME WINE--!
THOU DOST FORGET, HERCULES, THERE ARE NO TAVERNS ON EARTH, NOT IN THIS ERA.
BESIDES, MY MIND IS TOO HEAVY FOR SO LIGHT AN EVENING.
SIF IS SECURE IN ASGARD, HERCULES, MY CONCERN ISN'T FOR HER--
OH? HOW SO?
ART THOU WORRIED ABOUT THY LADY, SIF?
620
--BUT FOR KRISTA, THE GIRL WE SAVED FROM PLUTO.*
DOCTOR DON BLAKE OPERATED ON HER A FEW HOURS AGO--AS WE SPEAK, SHE LIES UNCONSCIOUS IN A HOSPITAL ROOM--
*RELATED IN THOR #223.--R.T.
"--AND I'VE THE UNSHAKEABLE SUSPICION THAT EVEN NOW--SHE'S STILL IN MOST DEADLY DANGER!"
AS THOUGH TO UNDERSCORE THE THUNDER GOD'S WORDS, AT THAT PRECISE INSTANT, NINETY MILLION MILES AWAY--
--A FIGURE FLASHING THROUGH SPACE USES THE MASSIVE GRAVITY OF THE SUN TO SLOW ITS FORWARD SPEED, BRAKING AS IT APPROACHES A CERTAIN PLANET--

--THE DUST-MOTE WORLD KNOWN BY GODS AND MEN ALIKE AS--EARTH!

TAKE A LONG LOOK AT THIS FLAMING FIGURE, TRUE BELIEVERS: YOU HAVE NEVER SEEN HIS LIKE BEFORE, NOR WILL YOU EVER SEE HIS LIKE AGAIN.

THOUGH HE'S BUT THE LATEST IN A LINE OF COSMIC HERALDS... HE'S BY NO MEANS THE WEAKEST.

NOT FOR HIS TEMPER ALONE IS HE KNOWN AND FEARED ON A THOUSAND WORLDS...

NOT FOR HIS BLAZING STAFF IS HE HATED AND LOVED...

...YET FOR BOTH THESE THINGS IS HE CALLED AS HE IS: FOR TEMPER AND STAFF ALIKE, HE IS NAMED--

FIRELORD!

AFTER DAYS OF TRANS-LIGHT TRAVEL, I HAVE ARRIVED.

SOMEWHERE ON THIS PLANET ARE THOSE WHOM I SEEK...

... AND MY INSTINCTS TELL ME THAT I'LL FIND BOTH OF THEM HERE, IN MERE MOMENTS.

AND MY INSTINCTS ARE SELDOM WRONG.

WITH A WAVE OF HIS STAFF, HE SEARS THROUGH THE LOCKED ROOF DOOR...

THIS DONE, HE ENTERS AND DESCENDS A STEEL STAIRWAY, HIS LONG STRIDES SWALLOWING THE STEPS IN FOURS...
...HIS BOOTS BURNING DEEP FOOTPRINTS BEHIND HIM...!
MEANWHILE, TEN STORIES BELOW...
IF THOU DOST INSIST ON VISITING THE GIRL,
SO BE IT.
PERHAPS AFTERWARDS...?
WE'LL SEE, FRIEND HERCULES.
FOR THE NONCE, HOWEVER, 'TIS NOT THOR WHO'S NEEDED HERE--
CHUM
--BUT FRAIL, HUMAN DONALD BLAKE.
THOR MAY BE THE SON OF ODIN, BUT HE DOESN'T HAVE A PHYSICIAN'S TRAINING...
...AND A PHYSICIAN IS WHAT KRISTA NEEDS, NOT A GLORY-HUNTING THUNDER GOD.
BY MY EYES, BLAKE-- THOU DOST CONFOUND ME.
THAT THOU, A MORTAL--A CRIPPLED MORTAL--COULD PREFER LIFE AS A HUMAN, TO LIFE AS A GOD.
THAT'S THE FUNNY PART, HERCULES.
WHEN I'M BLAKE, I DON'T CARE ABOUT THOR.
AND WHEN I'M THOR, DON BLAKE IS JUST YESTERDAY'S BAD DREAM.
SPEAKING OF BAD DREAMS... A SECOND AFTER THE TWO COMPANIONS ARRIVE, IN A CORRIDOR ON THE FLOOR ABOVE...
WHAT-- WHAT ON EARTH-- IS THAT?
YOU MEAN WHO-- DON'T YOU, NURSE PROCTOR?
SHE MEANS WHAT, KID! I'VE BEEN AN ORDERLY SIX YEARS--
--AND I'VE NEVER SEEN NO "WHO", WHO LOOKED LIKE-- THAT!
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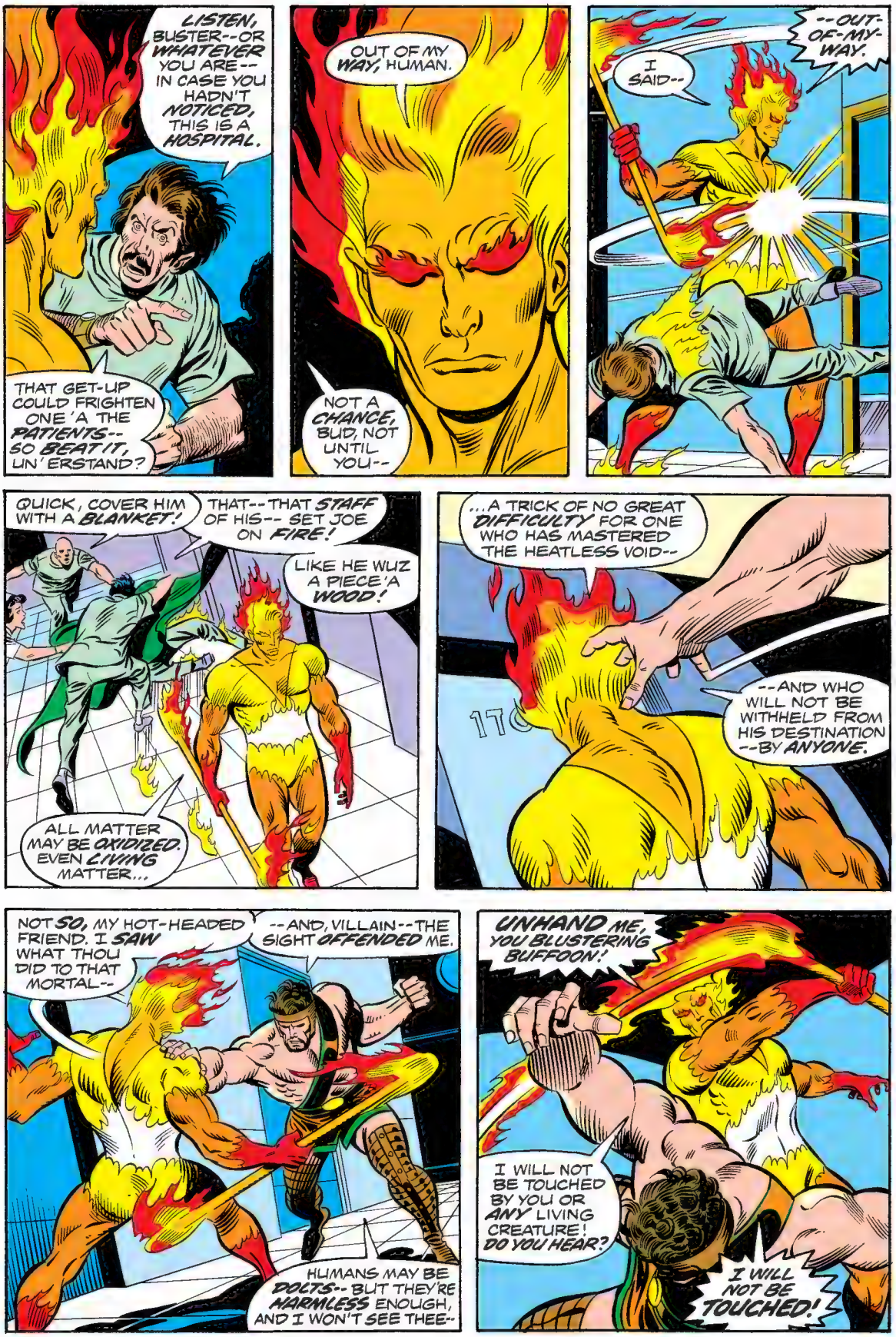
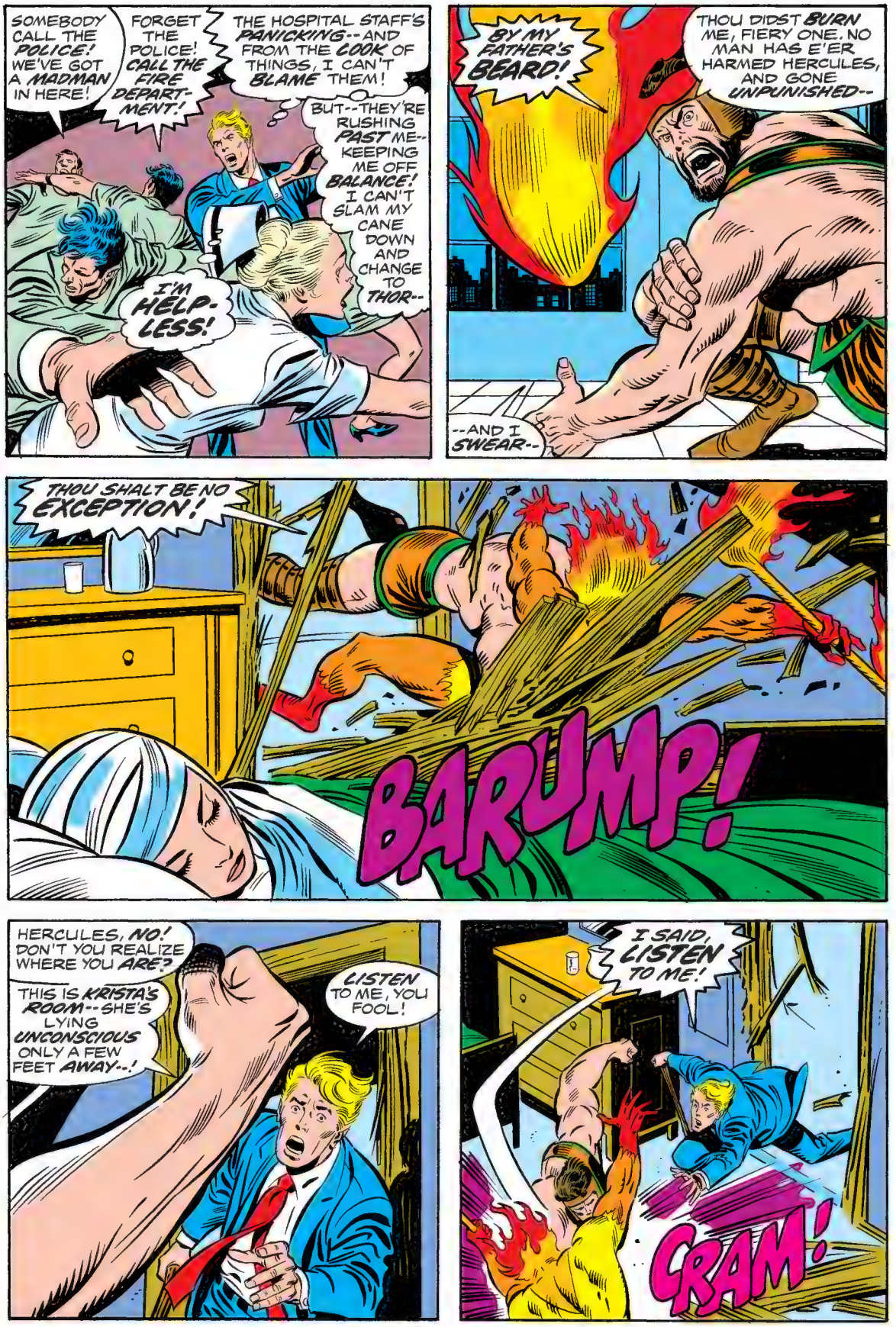
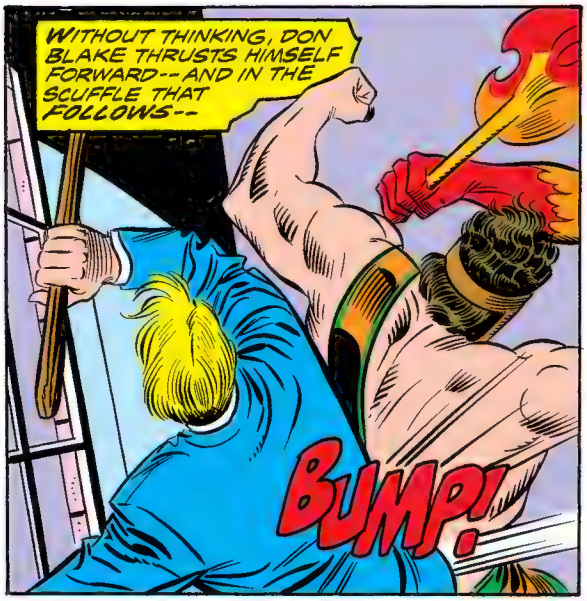
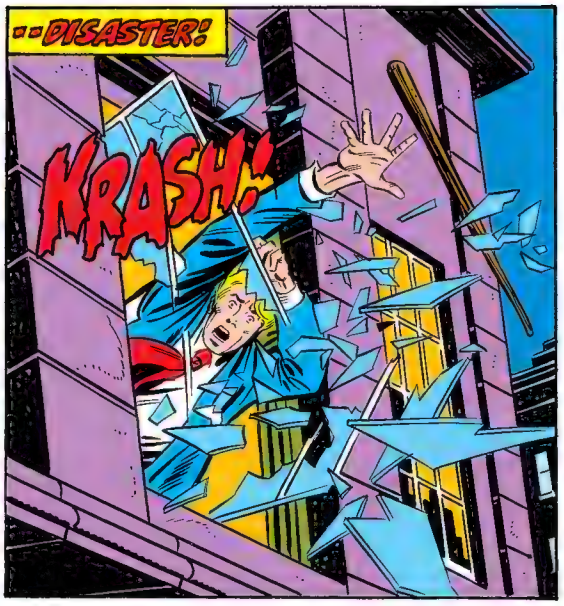

LISTEN, BUSTER--OR WHATEVER YOU ARE-- IN CASE YOU HADN'T NOTICED, THIS IS A HOSPITAL.
THAT GET-UP COULD FRIGHTEN ONE 'A THE PATIENTS-- SO BEAT IT, UN' ERSTAND?
OUT OF MY WAY, HUMAN.
NOT A CHANCE, BUD, NOT UNTIL YOU--
I SAID--
--OUT-OF-MY-WAY.
QUICK, COVER HIM WITH A BLANKET!
THAT--THAT STAFF OF HIS-- SET JOE ON FIRE!
LIKE HE WUZ A PIECE 'A WOOD!
ALL MATTER MAY BE OXIDIZED. EVEN LIVING MATTER...
...A TRICK OF NO GREAT DIFFICULTY FOR ONE WHO HAS MASTERED THE HEATLESS VOID--
--AND WHO WILL NOT BE WITHHELD FROM HIS DESTINATION --BY ANYONE.
NOT SO, MY HOT-HEADED FRIEND. I SAW WHAT THOU DID TO THAT MORTAL--
--AND, VILLAIN--THE SIGHT OFFENDED ME.
HUMANS MAY BE DOCTS-- BUT THEY'RE HARMLESS ENOUGH, AND I WON'T SEE THEE--
UNHAND ME, YOU BLUSTERING BUFFOON!
I WILL NOT BE TOUCHED BY YOU OR ANY LIVING CREATURE! DO YOU HEAR?
I WILL NOT BE TOUCHED!

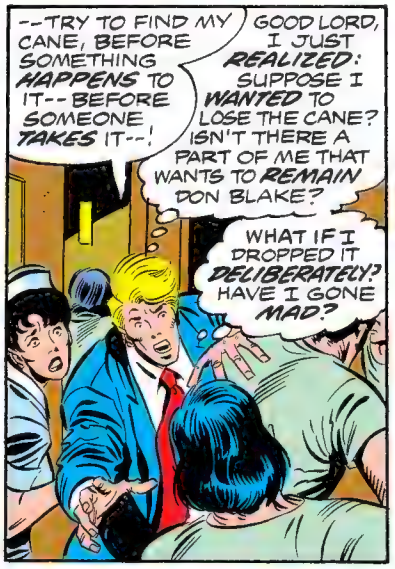

SOMEBODY CALL THE POLICE! WE'VE GOT A MADMAN IN HERE!
FORGET THE POLICE! CALL THE FIRE DEPARTMENT!
THE HOSPITAL STAFF'S PANICKING--AND FROM THE COOK OF THINGS, I CAN'T BLAME THEM!
BUT--THEY'RE RUSHING PAST ME--KEEPING ME OFF BALANCE! I CAN'T SLAM MY CANE DOWN AND CHANGE TO THOR--
I'M HELP-LESS!
BY MY FATHER'S BEARD!
THOU DIDST BURN ME, FIERY ONE, NO MAN HAS E'ER HARMED HERCULES, AND GONE UNPUNISHED--
--AND I SWEAR--
THOU SHALT BE NO EXCEPTION!
BARUMP!
HERCULES, NO! DON'T YOU REALIZE WHERE YOU ARE?
THIS IS KRISTA'S ROOM--SHE'S LYING UNCONSCIOUS ONLY A FEW FEET AWAY--!
LISTEN TO ME, YOU FOOL!
I SAID, LISTEN TO ME!
CRAM!

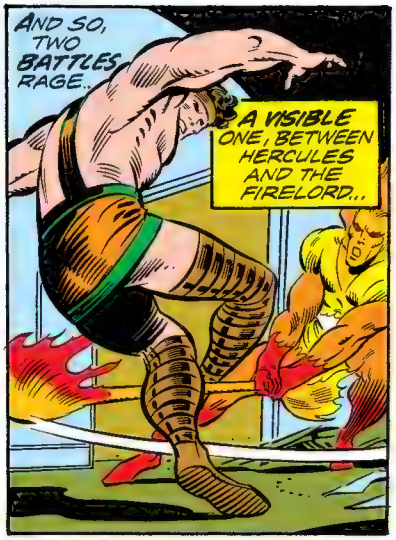

WITHOUT THINKING, DON BLAKE THRUSTS HIMSELF FORWARD--AND IN THE SCUFFLE THAT FOLLOWS--
BUMP!

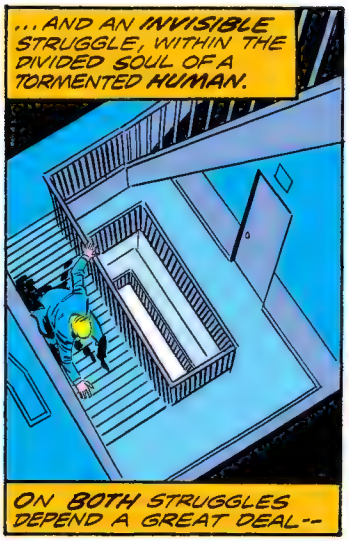

--DISASTER!
KRASH!

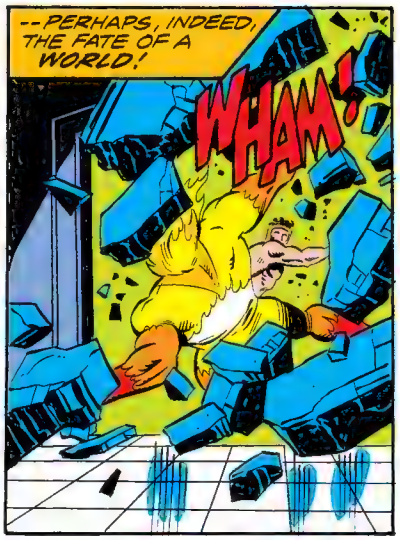
MY CANE!
HEAVEN HELP ME, I DROPPED IT!

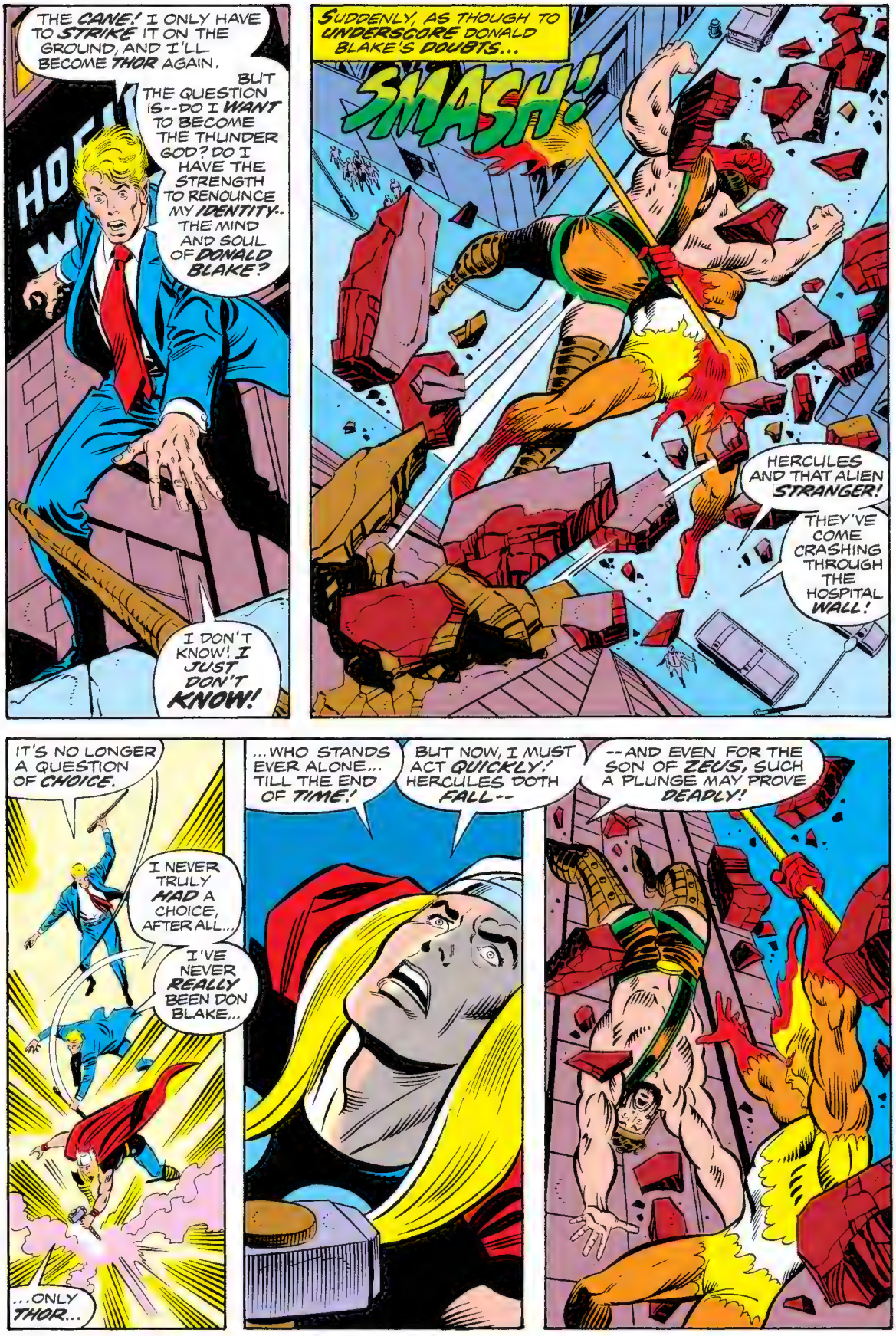
WITHOUT IT, I CAN'T BECOME THOR--I'LL BE TRAPPED AS DON BLAKE, POSSIBLY--FOREVER!
I'VE GOT TO GET DOWN THERE--

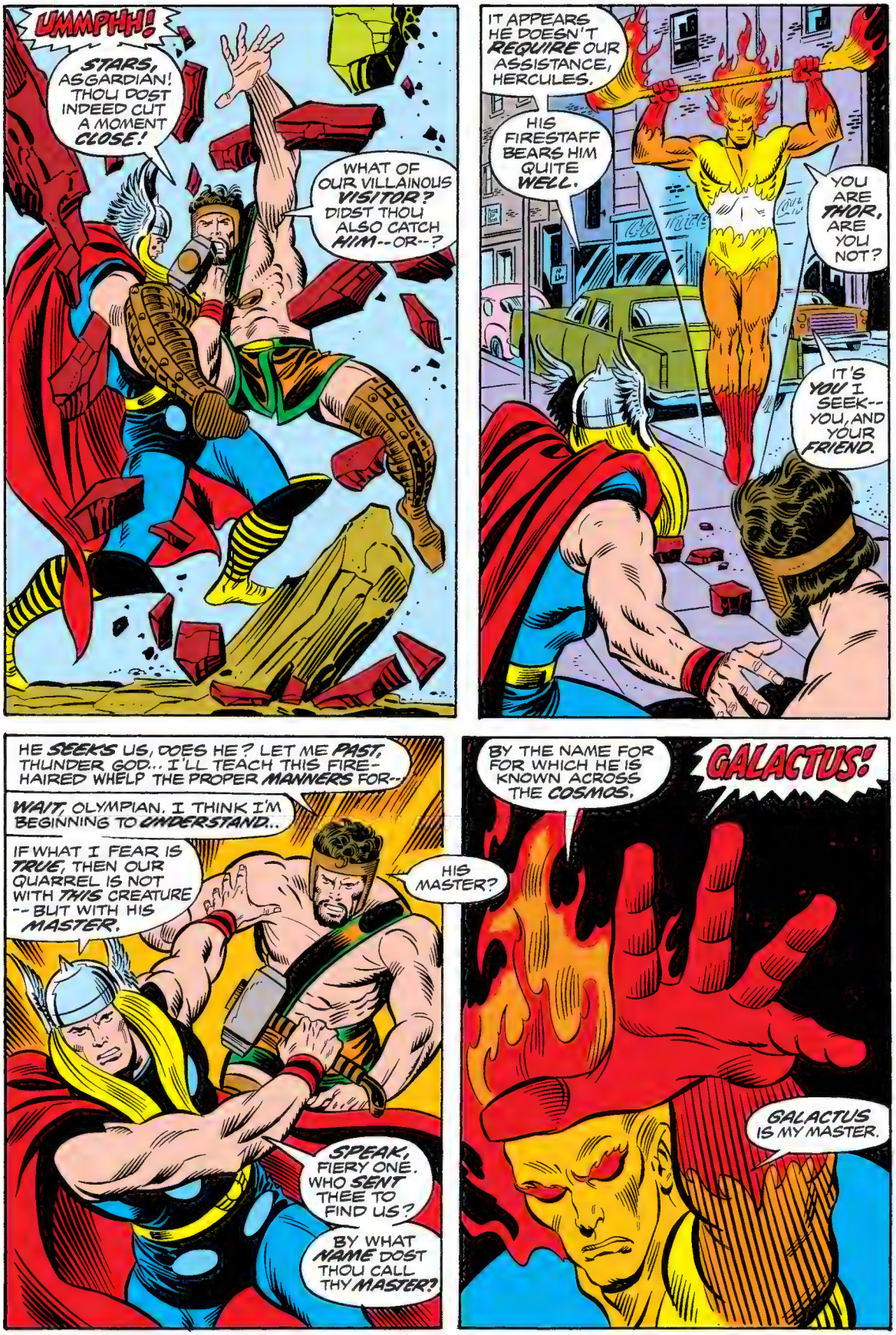

--TRY TO FIND MY CANE, BEFORE SOMETHING HAPPENS TO IT--BEFORE SOMEONE TAKES IT--!
GOOD LORD, I JUST REALIZED: SUPPOSE I WANTED TO LOSE THE CANE? ISN'T THERE A PART OF ME THAT WANTS TO REMAIN DON BLAKE?
WHAT IF I DROPPED IT DELIBERATELY? HAVE I GONE MAD?

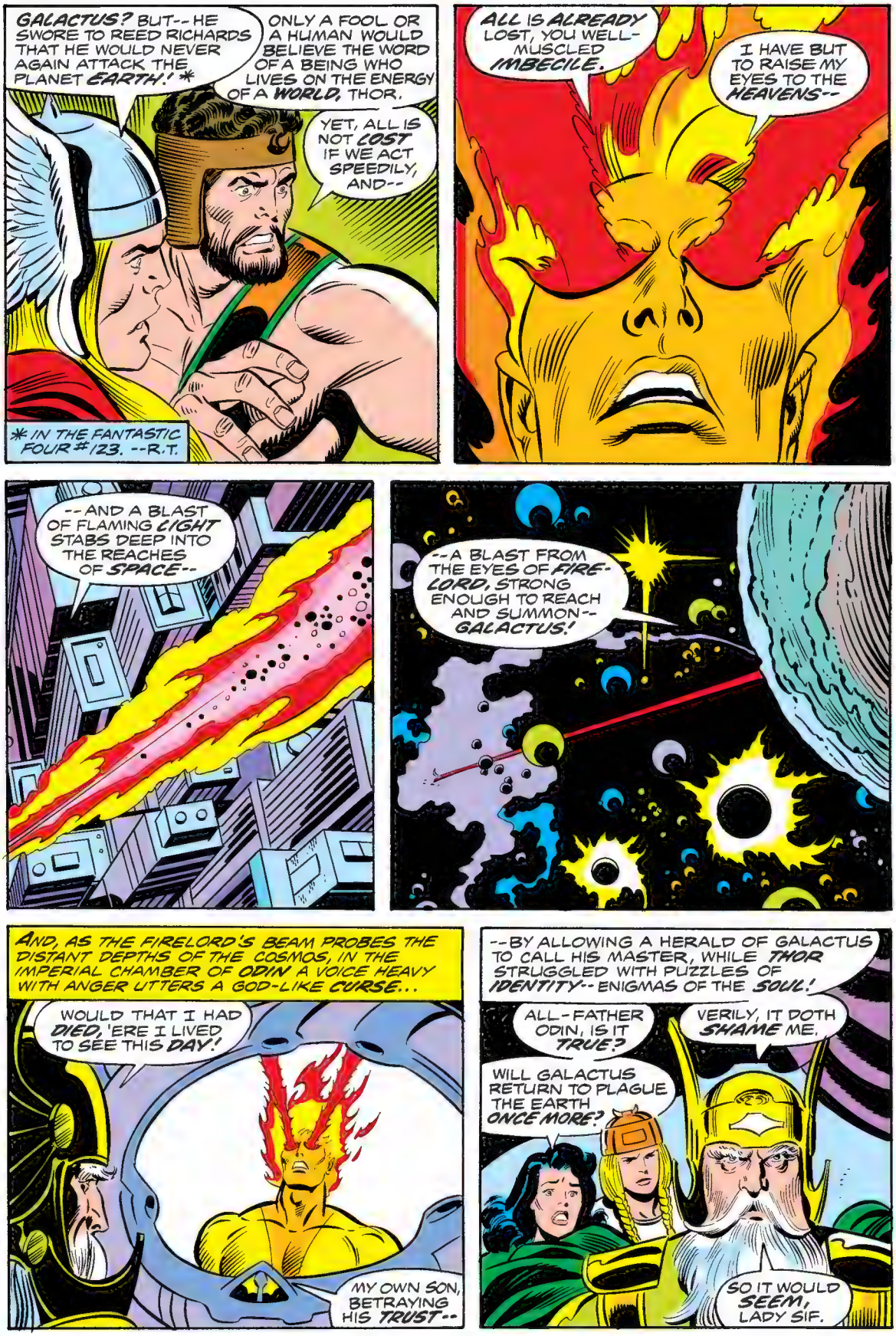

AND SO, TWO BATTLES RAGE..
A VISIBLE ONE, BETWEEN HERCULES AND THE FIRELORD..

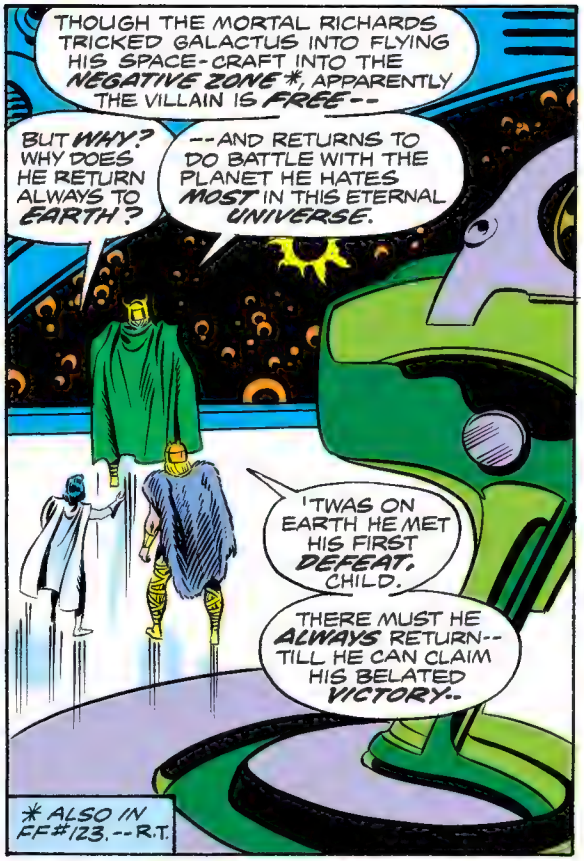

...AND AN INVISIBLE STRUGGLE, WITHIN THE DIVIDED SOUL OF A TORMENTED HUMAN.
ON BOTH STRUGGLES DEPEND A GREAT DEAL--

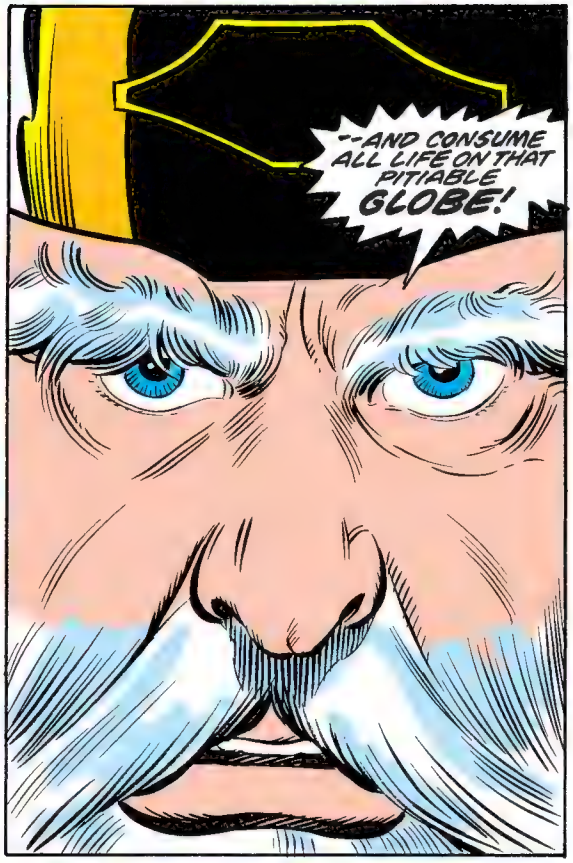

--PERHAPS, INDEED, THE FATE OF A WORLD!
WHAM!


THE CANE! I ONLY HAVE TO STRIKE IT ON THE GROUND, AND I'LL BECOME THOR AGAIN.
BUT THE QUESTION IS--DO I WANT TO BECOME THE THUNDER GOD? DO I HAVE THE STRENGTH TO RENOUNCE MY IDENTITY--THE MIND AND SOUL OF DONALD BLAKE?
I DON'T KNOW! I JUST DON'T KNOW!
SUDDENLY, AS THOUGH TO UNDERSCORE DONALD BLAKE'S DOUBTS...
SMASH!
HERCULES AND THAT ALIEN STRANGER!
THEY'VE COME CRASHING THROUGH THE HOSPITAL WALL!
IT'S NO LONGER A QUESTION OF CHOICE.
I NEVER TRULY HAD A CHOICE, AFTER ALL...
I'VE NEVER REALLY BEEN DON BLAKE...
...ONLY THOR...
...WHO STANDS EVER ALONE... TILL THE END OF TIME!
BUT NOW, I MUST ACT QUICKLY! HERCULES DOTH FALL--
--AND EVEN FOR THE SON OF ZEUS, SUCH A PLUNGE MAY PROVE DEADLY!

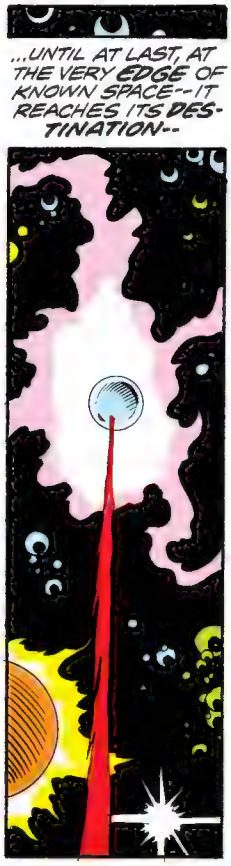

UMMPHH!
STARS, ASGARDIAN! THOU DOST INDEED CUT A MOMENT CLOSE!
WHAT OF OUR VILLAINOUS VISITOR? DIDST THOU ALSO CATCH HIM--OR--?
IT APPEARS HE DOESN'T REQUIRE OUR ASSISTANCE, HERCULES.
HIS FIRESTAFF BEARS HIM QUITE WELL.
YOU ARE THOR, ARE YOU NOT?
IT'S YOU I SEEK--YOU, AND YOUR FRIEND.
HE SEEKS US, DOES HE? LET ME PAST, THUNDER GOD... I'LL TEACH THIS FIRE-HAIRED WHELP THE PROPER MANNERS FOR--
WAIT, OLYMPIAN. I THINK I'M BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND...
IF WHAT I FEAR IS TRUE, THEN OUR QUARREL IS NOT WITH THIS CREATURE -- BUT WITH HIS MASTER.
HIS MASTER?
SPEAK, FIERY ONE. WHO SENT THEE TO FIND US?
BY WHAT NAME DOST THOU CALL THY MASTER?
BY THE NAME FOR FOR WHICH HE IS KNOWN ACROSS THE COSMOS.
GALACTUS!
GALACTUS IS MY MASTER.

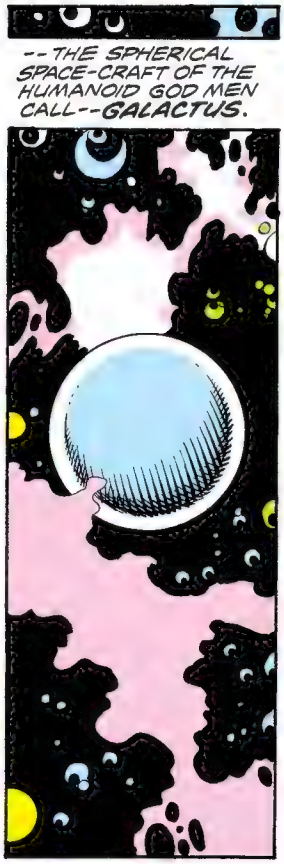

GALACTUS? BUT-- HE SWORE TO REED RICHARDS THAT HE WOULD NEVER AGAIN ATTACK THE PLANET EARTH! *
ONLY A FOOL OR A HUMAN WOULD BELIEVE THE WORD OF A BEING WHO LIVES ON THE ENERGY OF A WORLD, THOR.
YET, ALL IS NOT LOST IF WE ACT SPEEDILY, AND--
* IN THE FANTASTIC FOUR #123. --R.T.
ALL IS ALREADY LOST, YOU WELL-MUSCLED IMBECILE.
I HAVE BUT TO RAISE MY EYES TO THE HEAVENS--
--AND A BLAST OF FLAMING LIGHT STABS DEEP INTO THE REACHES OF SPACE--
--A BLAST FROM THE EYES OF FIRE-LORD, STRONG ENOUGH TO REACH AND SUMMON-- GALACTUS!
AND, AS THE FIRELORD'S BEAM PROBES THE DISTANT DEPTHS OF THE COSMOS, IN THE IMPERIAL CHAMBER OF ODIN A VOICE HEAVY WITH ANGER UTTERS A GOD-LIKE CURSE...
WOULD THAT I HAD DIED, 'ERE I LIVED TO SEE THIS DAY!
MY OWN SON, BETRAYING HIS TRUST--
--BY ALLOWING A HERALD OF GALACTUS TO CALL HIS MASTER, WHILE THOR STRUGGLED WITH PUZZLES OF IDENTITY-- ENIGMAS OF THE SOUL!
ALL-FATHER ODIN, IS IT TRUE?
VERILY, IT DOTH SHAME ME.
WILL GALACTUS RETURN TO PLAGUE THE EARTH ONCE MORE?
SO IT WOULD SEEM, LADY SIF.


THOUGH THE MORTAL RICHARDS TRICKED GALACTUS INTO FLYING HIS SPACE-CRAFT INTO THE NEGATIVE ZONE*, APPARENTLY THE VILLAIN IS FREE--
BUT WHY? WHY DOES HE RETURN ALWAYS TO EARTH?
--AND RETURNS TO DO BATTLE WITH THE PLANET HE HATES MOST IN THIS ETERNAL UNIVERSE.
'TWAS ON EARTH HE MET HIS FIRST DEFEAT, CHILD.
THERE MUST HE ALWAYS RETURN-- TILL HE CAN CLAIM HIS BELATED VICTORY..
* ALSO IN FF#123.--R.T.

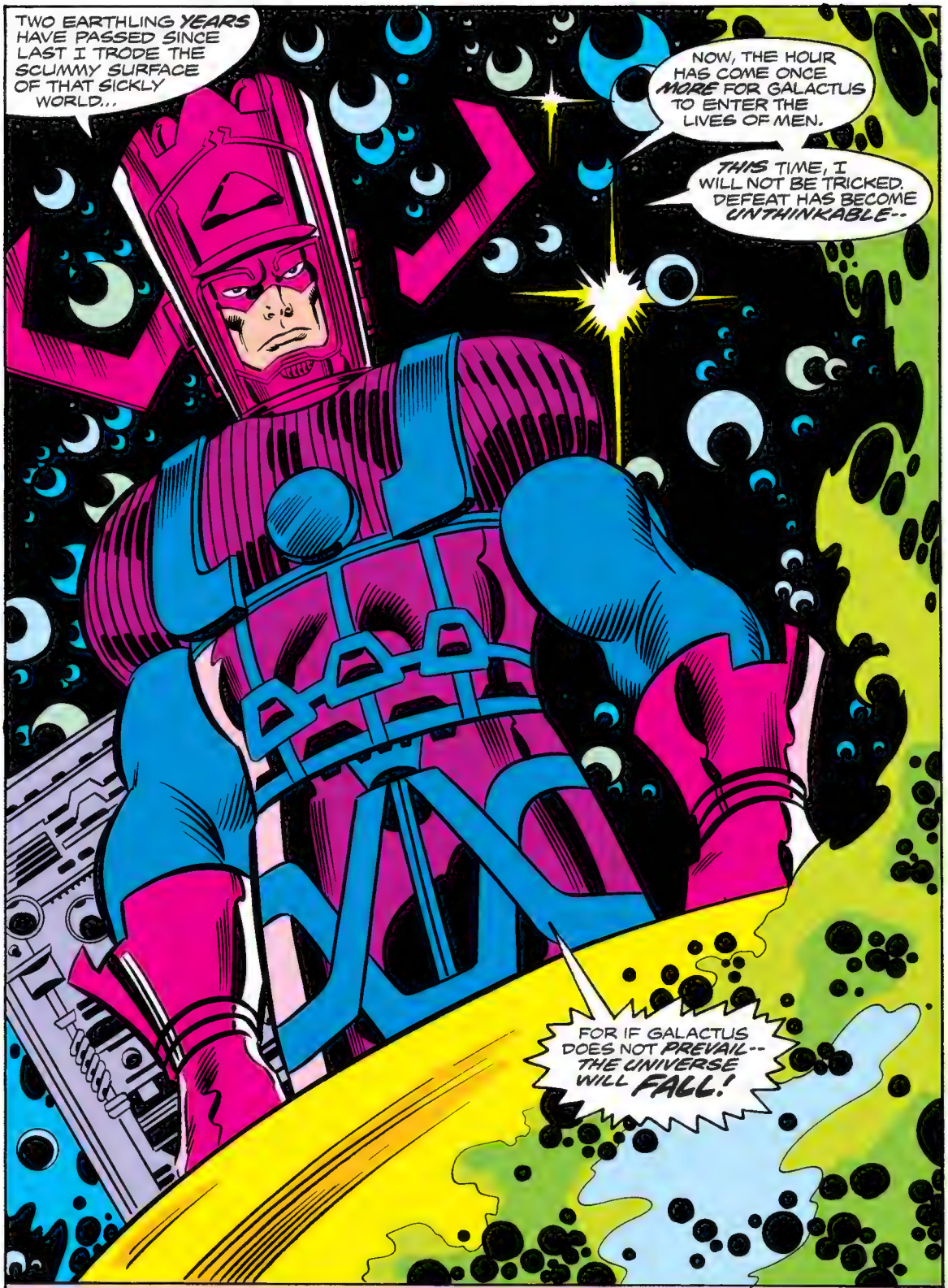

--AND CONSUME ALL LIFE ON THAT PITIABLE GLOBE!

ONWARD, THE LIGHT-BLAST RACES; ONWARD, THROUGH A SEA OF STARS...


...UNTIL AT LAST, AT THE VERY EDGE OF KNOWN SPACE--IT REACHES ITS DESTINATION--


--THE SPHERICAL SPACE-CRAFT OF THE HUMANOID GOD MEN CALL--GALACTUS.

FOR A MOMENT, TIME ITSELF SEEMS TO PAUSE.
THEN, EVER SO SLOWLY, A PORTAL OPENS IN THE APPARENTLY-SEAMLESS SKIN OF THE GLOBULAR CRAFT.
SOMETHING MOVES WITHIN.
IT IS GALACTUS!


TWO EARTHLING YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE LAST I TRODE THE SCUMMY SURFACE OF THAT SICKLY WORLD...
NOW, THE HOUR HAS COME ONCE MORE FOR GALACTUS TO ENTER THE LIVES OF MEN.
THIS TIME, I WILL NOT BE TRICKED. DEFEAT HAS BECOME UNTHINKABLE--
FOR IF GALACTUS DOES NOT PREVAIL-- THE UNIVERSE WILL FALL!

SO YOU THINK YOU'VE GOT IT FIGURED, DO YOU? FORGET IT, FRANTIC ONE-- WE PROMISE YOU, WHATEVER YOU EXPECT OUR NEXT ISSUE TO BE, IT'LL BE BEYOND YOUR WILDEST EXPECTATIONS! TUNE IN FOR PART THREE (YEP, PART THREE, GANG) OF THE MOST UNPREDICTABLE THUNDER GOD SAGA OF ALL TIME--A STORY WE CALL:

THE WORLD AT THE END OF SPACE!

THOR
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02450
THE MIGHTY
THOR
I NEED YOUR HELP, THUNDER GOD! WITHOUT IT, I FALL--AND THE EARTH WITH ME!
AND YON SHADOW BELONGS TO HIM WHO HATH DEFEATED THEE!
BUT, CAN EVEN THOR PREVAIL--'GAINST ONE WHO HATH CONQUERED GALACTUS?
WHO STANDS WITH GALACTUS?

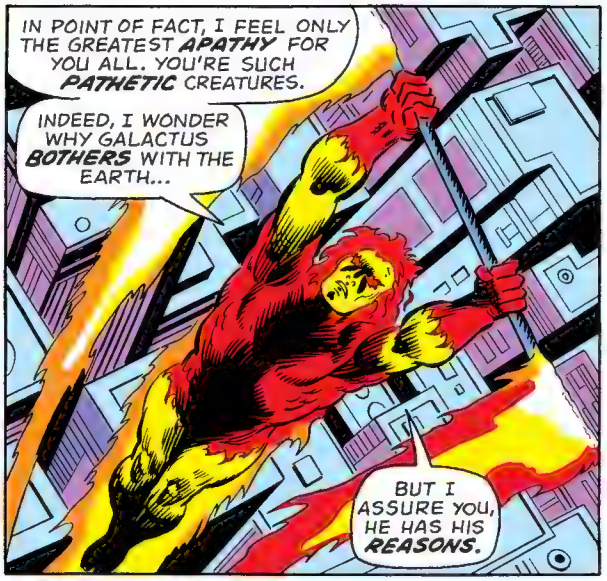
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE MIGHTY THOR!

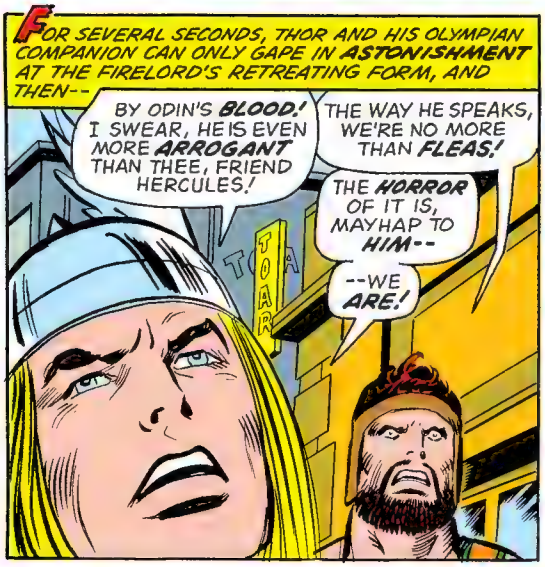
GERRY CONWAY WRITER * JOHN BUSCEMA ARTIST * MIKE ESPOSITO EMBELLISHER * ARTIE SIMEK, LETTERER G. ROUSSOS, COLORIST * ROY THOMAS EDITOR

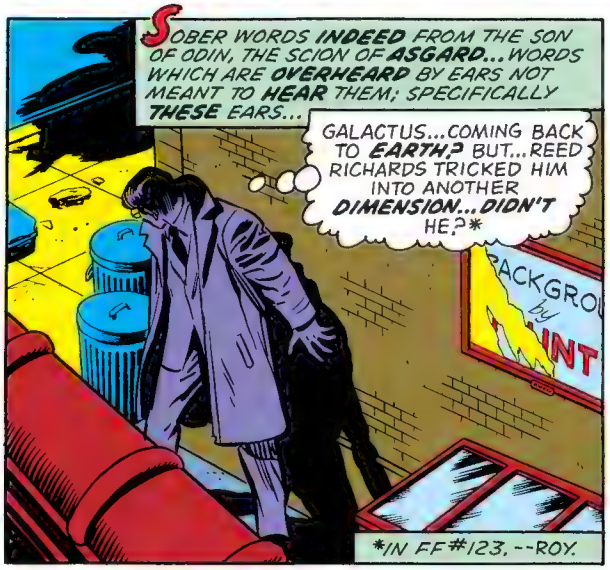
THE BATTLE BEYOND!
WE'RE TOO LATE, THUNDER GOD! THE FIRELORD HAS ALREADY GIVEN HIS SIGNAL--
THE EARTH IS DOOMED!
NAY! NOT TILL MY LAST BREATH IS DRAWN SHALL I SURRENDER!
IF THIS PLANET MUST FALL TO GALACTUS, LET IT FALL WHEN I HAVE FALLEN--NOT BEFORE!
SO SWEARS THOR! SO SWEARS THE GOD OF THUNDER!

NOW, VARLET--WE SHALL TEST THE FABRIC OF THY METTLE!
'TIS THOR WHO FACES THEE NOW, NOT HERCULES--
--AND BY MY FATHER'S THRONE, 'TIS THOR WHO IS THE STRONGER!
KAPLOW!
HA! ASGARDIAN, THE FIRELORD HAST PROVEN THE LIE IN THY WORDS--
NO ONE IS STRONGER THAN HERCULES--NOT EVEN THEE!
STEP ASIDE, AND I SHALL--
YOU WILL REMAIN WHERE YOU ARE, HERCULES--OR CHANCE THE FURY OF MY COSMIC FLAME!
I'VE COMPLETED MY MISSION; I'VE SUMMONED MY MASTER--
--AND MY BUSINESS HERE IS DONE.
DIRECT YOUR RAGE AT GALACTUS, NOT AT ME--
I'M SURE IT WILL AMUSE HIM.
IN THE MEANTIME, BLAME ME NOT FOR MY MASTER'S COMMANDS--

--FOR I WARN YOU, IT WILL BRING YOU ONLY GRIEF.
TILL NEXT WE MEET-- REMEMBER:
I HAVE NO PERSONAL ENMITY... NO ILL WILL TOWARD EITHER YOU OR THIS WORLD--

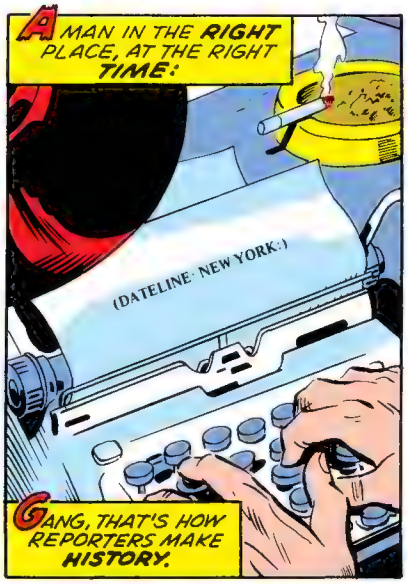

IN POINT OF FACT, I FEEL ONLY THE GREATEST APATHY FOR YOU ALL. YOU'RE SUCH PATHETIC CREATURES.
INDEED, I WONDER WHY GALACTUS BOTHERS WITH THE EARTH...
BUT I ASSURE YOU, HE HAS HIS REASONS.

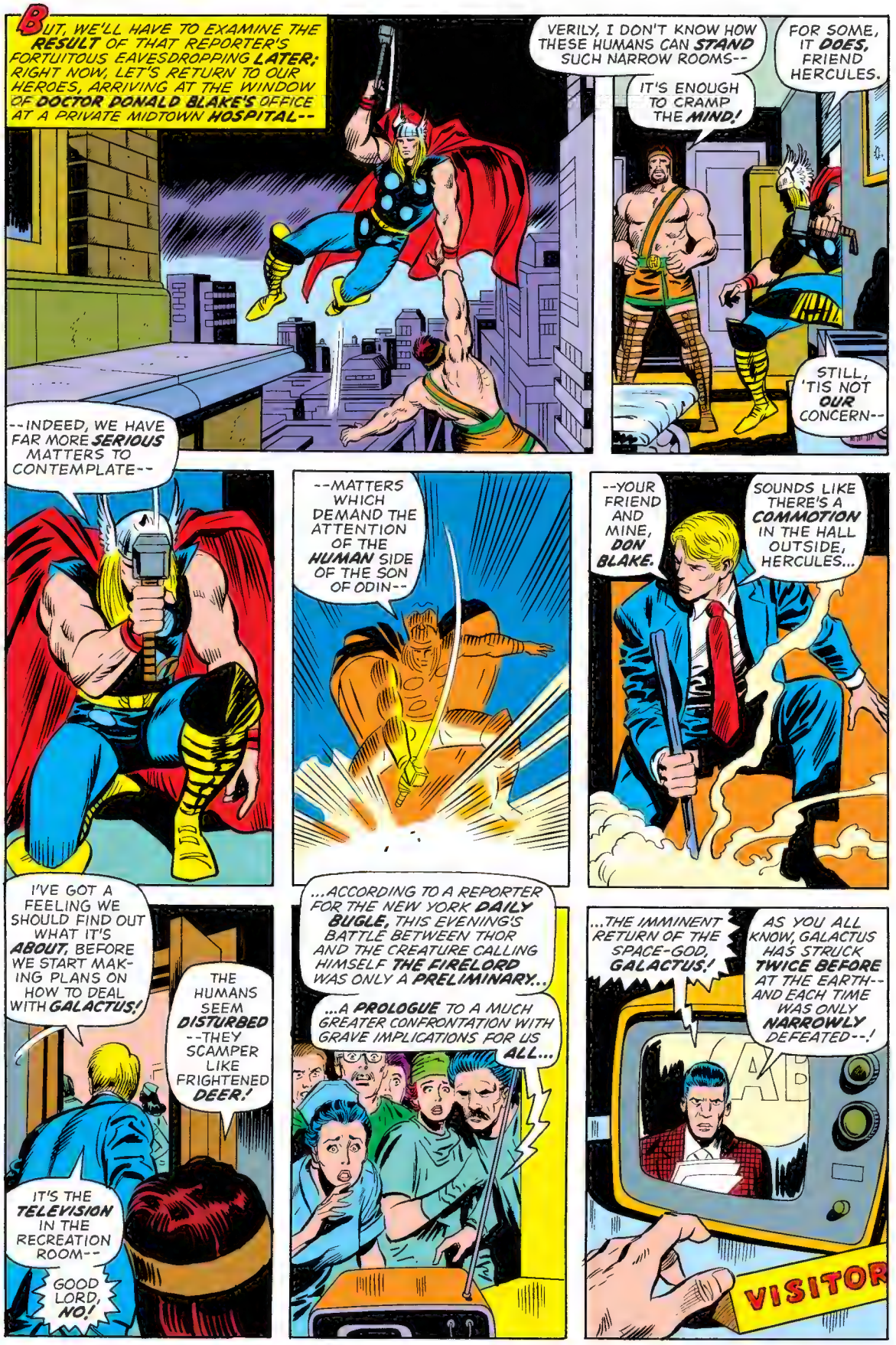

FOR SEVERAL SECONDS, THOR AND HIS OLYMPIAN COMPANION CAN ONLY GAPE IN ASTONISHMENT AT THE FIRELORD'S RETREATING FORM, AND THEN--
BY ODIN'S BLOOD! I SWEAR, HE IS EVEN MORE ARROGANT THAN THEE, FRIEND HERCULES!
THE WAY HE SPEAKS, WE'RE NO MORE THAN FLEAS!
THE HORROR OF IT IS, MAYHAP TO HIM--
--WE ARE!


SOBER WORDS INDEED FROM THE SON OF ODIN, THE SCION OF ASGARD... WORDS WHICH ARE OVERHEARD BY EARS NOT MEANT TO HEAR THEM; SPECIFICALLY THESE EARS...
GALACTUS...COMING BACK TO EARTH? BUT...REED RICHARDS TRICKED HIM INTO ANOTHER DIMENSION...DIDN'T HE?*
*IN FF#123. --ROY.

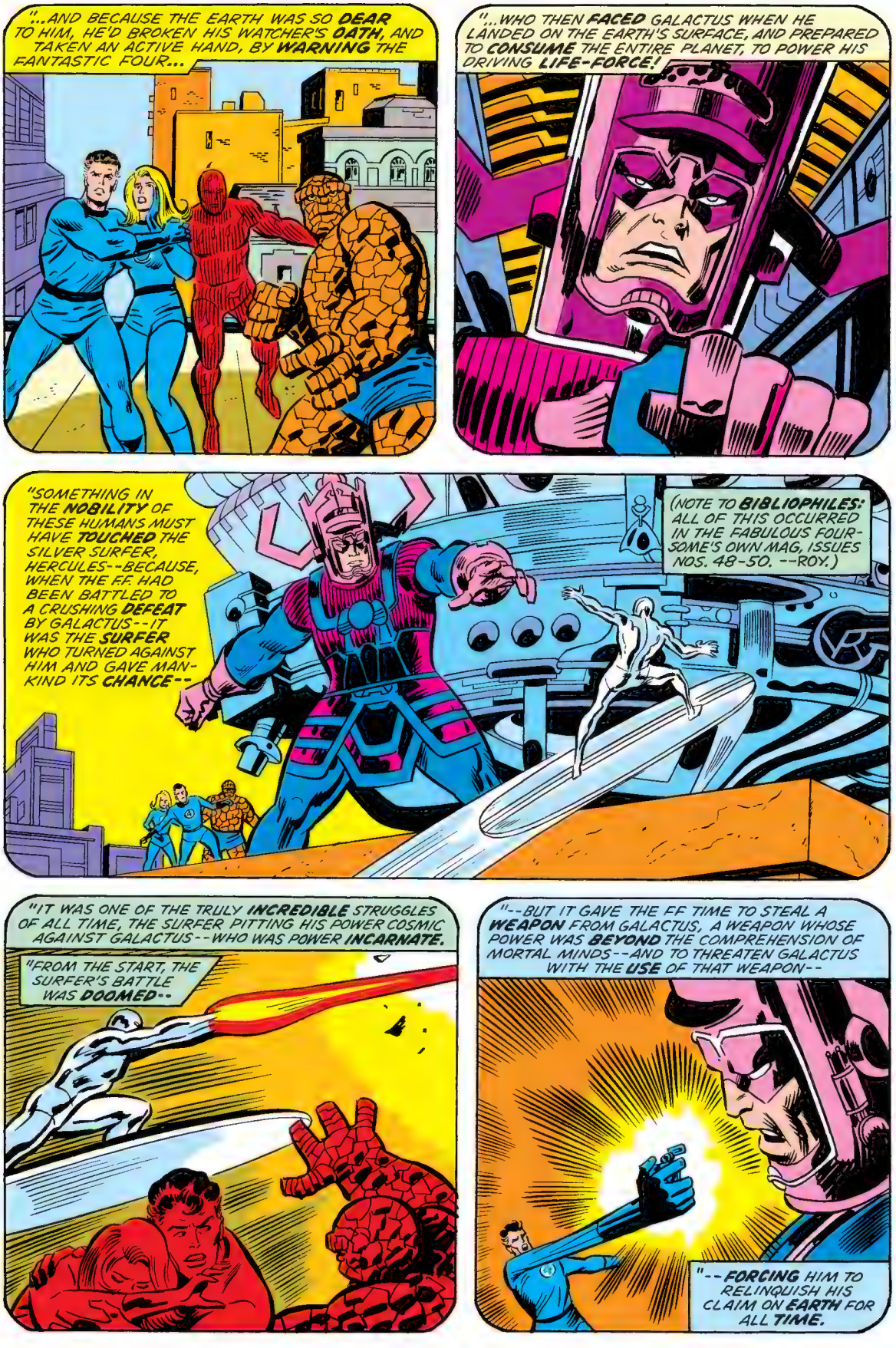
NO, IT CAN'T BE A MISTAKE--NOT THE WAY THOR AND HERCULES ARE TALKING ABOUT IT! IT'S TRUE...
...THE ENTIRE WORLD IS DOOMED!

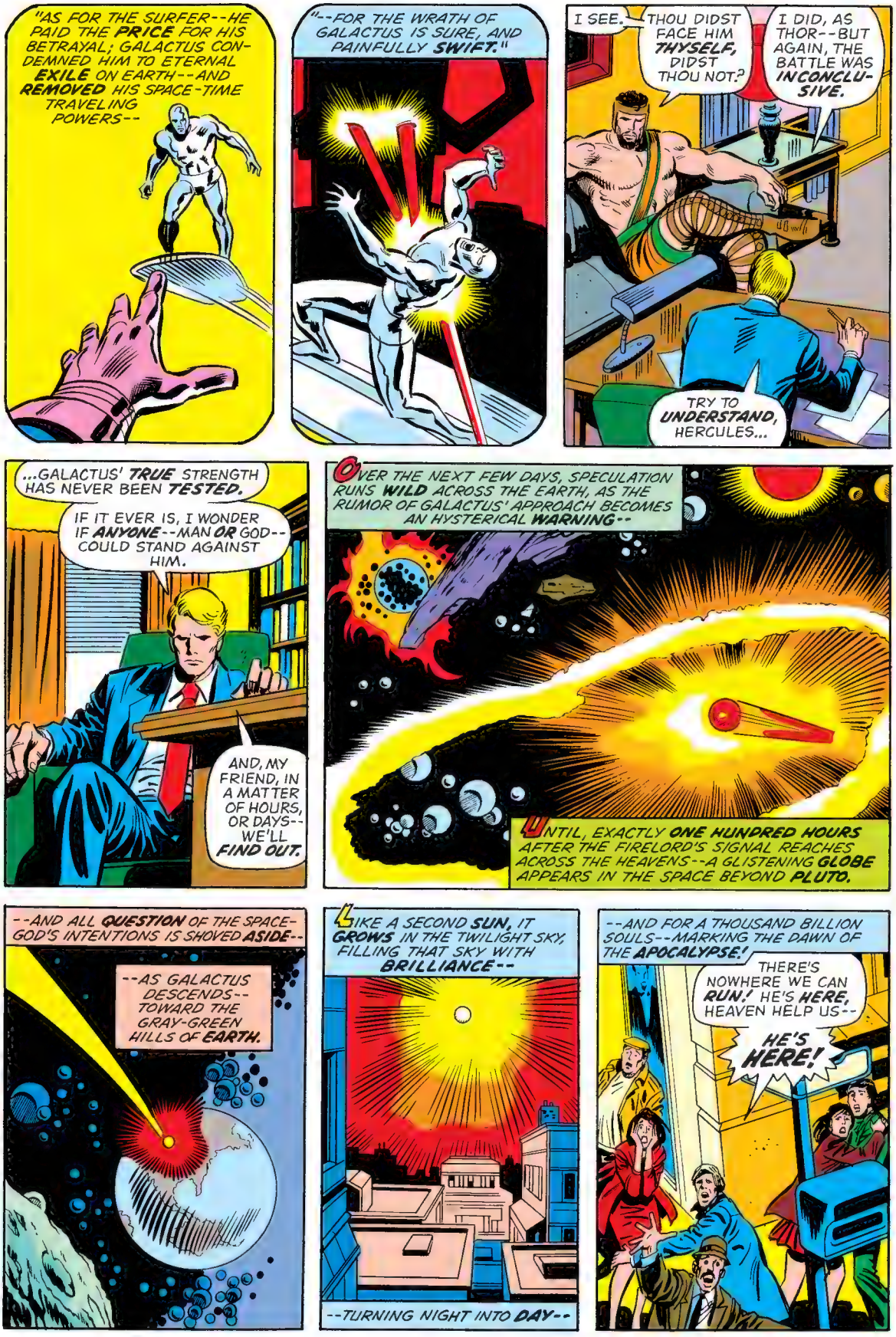
FUNNY. MY WHOLE CAREER, I'VE LOOKED FOR THE REALLY BIG SCOOP, THE STORY OF THE CENTURY THAT'D WIN ME A PULITZER PRIZE...
NOW I'VE GOT IT...AND I'LL PROBABLY BE DEAD BEFORE I CAN COLLECT THE CRUMMY AWARD!

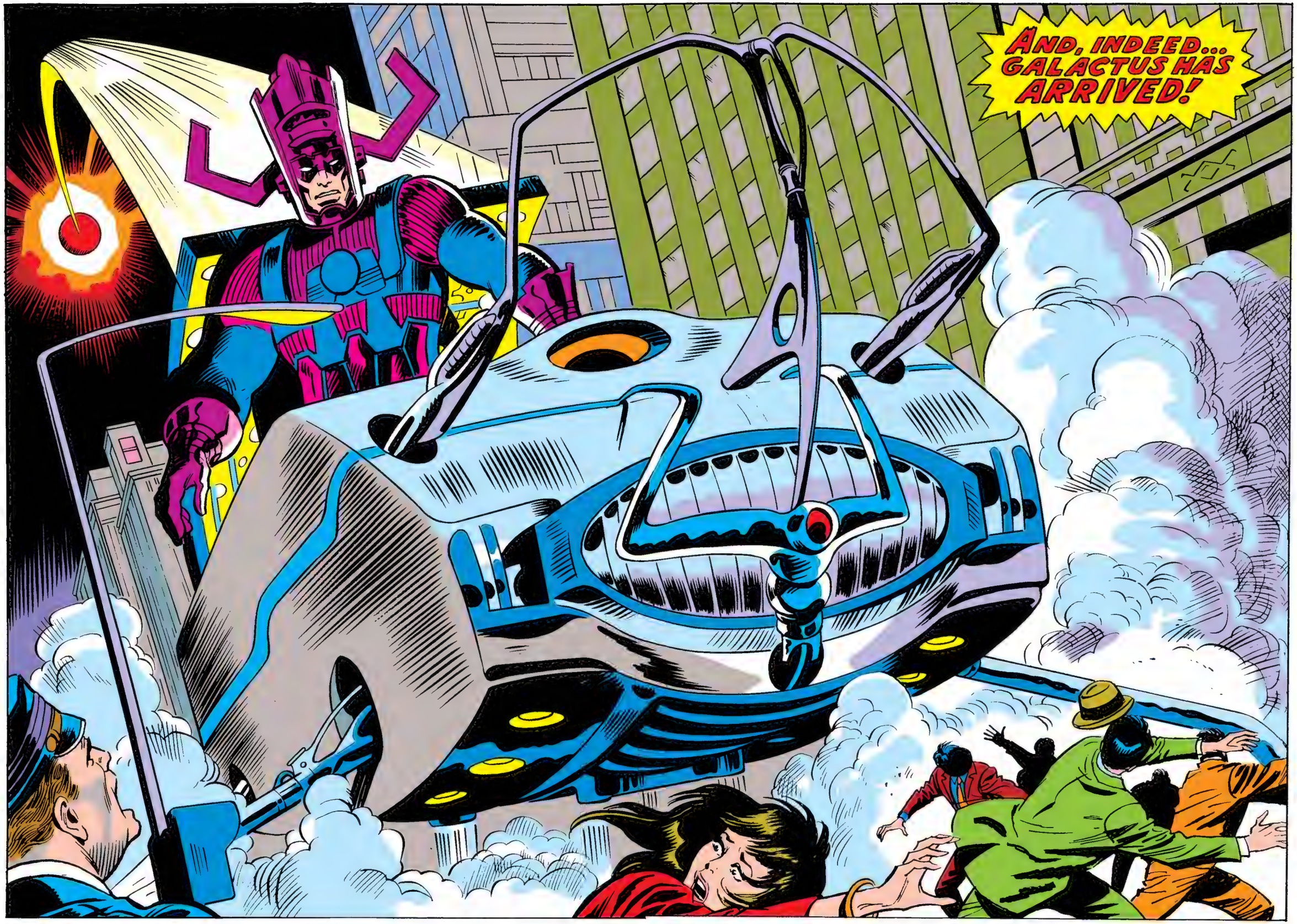

A MAN IN THE RIGHT PLACE, AT THE RIGHT TIME!
(DATELINE: NEW YORK:)
GANG, THAT'S HOW REPORTERS MAKE HISTORY.


BUT, WE'LL HAVE TO EXAMINE THE RESULT OF THAT REPORTER'S FORTUITOUS EAVESDROPPING LATER; RIGHT NOW, LET'S RETURN TO OUR HEROES, ARRIVING AT THE WINDOW OF DOCTOR DONALD BLAKE'S OFFICE AT A PRIVATE MIDTOWN HOSPITAL--
VERILY, I DON'T KNOW HOW THESE HUMANS CAN STAND SUCH NARROW ROOMS--
IT'S ENOUGH TO CRAMP THE MIND!
FOR SOME, IT DOES, FRIEND HERCULES.
STILL, 'TIS NOT OUR CONCERN--
--INDEED, WE HAVE FAR MORE SERIOUS MATTERS TO CONTEMPLATE--
--MATTERS WHICH DEMAND THE ATTENTION OF THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE SON OF ODIN--
--YOUR FRIEND AND MINE, DON BLAKE.
SOUNDS LIKE THERE'S A COMMOTION IN THE HALL OUTSIDE, HERCULES...
I'VE GOT A FEELING WE SHOULD FIND OUT WHAT IT'S ABOUT, BEFORE WE START MAKING PLANS ON HOW TO DEAL WITH GALACTUS!
THE HUMANS SEEM DISTURBED --THEY SCAMPER LIKE FRIGHTENED DEER!
IT'S THE TELEVISION IN THE RECREATION ROOM--
GOOD LORD, NO!
...ACCORDING TO A REPORTER FOR THE NEW YORK DAILY BUGLE, THIS EVENING'S BATTLE BETWEEN THOR AND THE CREATURE CALLING HIMSELF THE FIRELORD WAS ONLY A PRELIMINARY...
...A PROLOGUE TO A MUCH GREATER CONFRONTATION WITH GRAVE IMPLICATIONS FOR US ALL...
...THE IMMINENT RETURN OF THE SPACE-GOD, GALACTUS!
AS YOU ALL KNOW, GALACTUS HAS STRUCK TWICE BEFORE AT THE EARTH--AND EACH TIME WAS ONLY NARROWLY DEFEATED--!
VISITOR

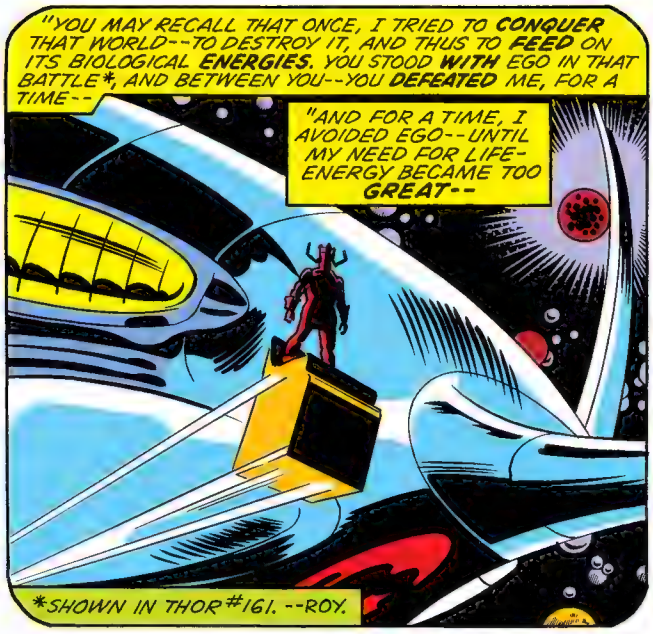
THE QUESTION WHICH CONFRONTS US NOW IS--CAN GALACTUS BE DEFEATED AGAIN?
OR IS THIS THE END OF CIVILIZATION--IN FACT, THE END OF ALL MANKIND?
THOUGH THE NEWSCASTER CONTINUES HIS SPEECH, THERE'S REALLY NO POINT IN LISTENING ANY LONGER...A FACT ALL TOO BITTERLY APPARENT TO A GRIM DONALD BLAKE...
IN OLYMPUS, WE HEARD OF THIS SPACE-GOD, MY FRIEND--
IS HE TRULY AS POWERFUL AS YON MORTAL PROCLAIMS?
THE WORD POWER DOESN'T DESCRIBE HIM, HERCULES--IN A WAY, HE'S POWER INCARNATE.
I'D HOPED WE COULD KEEP ALL OF THIS A SECRET, POSSIBLY MEET GALACTUS ON THE FRINGE OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM--THAT'S WHY I BECAME BLAKE, SO WE COULD TALK WITHOUT DRAWING ATTENTION TO OURSELVES--!
I SEE THAT'S HOPELESS NOW.
YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT GALACTUS, HERCULES? I'LL TELL YOU, THEN--AND BELIEVE ME WHEN I SAY THIS IS ALL THE TRUTH--
A NIGHTMARE--BUT THE TRUTH.
"THE WORLD FIRST LEARNED OF GALACTUS A FEW YEARS AGO--
"--WHEN AN ALIEN CALLED THE SILVER SURFER ENTERED THIS QUADRANT OF SPACE...
"THERE ISN'T A PERSON ON EARTH WHO DOESN'T REMEMBER THAT DAY--THE DAY THE SKY TURNED TO FLAME, GOLDEN FIRE THAT STRETCHED FROM HORIZON TO HORIZON--
"--ALL OF IT PROJECTED BY THE WATCHER, IN AN EFFORT TO CONCEAL THE EARTH FROM THE SURFER'S SEARCHING EYES.
"THE SURFER, YOU SEE, WAS A COSMIC SCOUT, SEEKING A WORLD ON WHICH HIS MASTER COULD FEED...
"IN HIS OBSERVATION OF THE UNIVERSE, THE WATCHER HAD WITNESSED THIS PROCESS COUNTLESS TIMES...


"...AND BECAUSE THE EARTH WAS SO DEAR TO HIM, HE'D BROKEN HIS WATCHER'S OATH, AND TAKEN AN ACTIVE HAND, BY WARNING THE FANTASTIC FOUR...
"...WHO THEN FACED GALACTUS WHEN HE LANDED ON THE EARTH'S SURFACE, AND PREPARED TO CONSUME THE ENTIRE PLANET, TO POWER HIS DRIVING LIFE-FORCE!
"SOMETHING IN THE NOBILITY OF THESE HUMANS MUST HAVE TOUCHED THE SILVER SURFER, HERCULES--BECAUSE, WHEN THE F.F. HAD BEEN BATTLED TO A CRUSHING DEFEAT BY GALACTUS--IT WAS THE SURFER WHO TURNED AGAINST HIM AND GAVE MANKIND ITS CHANCE--
(NOTE TO BIBLIOPHILES: ALL OF THIS OCCURRED IN THE FABULOUS FOUR-SOME'S OWN MAG, ISSUES NOS. 48-50. --ROY.)
"IT WAS ONE OF THE TRULY INCREDIBLE STRUGGLES OF ALL TIME, THE SURFER PITTING HIS POWER COSMIC AGAINST GALACTUS--WHO WAS POWER INCARNATE.
"FROM THE START, THE SURFER'S BATTLE WAS DOOMED--
"--BUT IT GAVE THE FF TIME TO STEAL A WEAPON FROM GALACTUS, A WEAPON WHOSE POWER WAS BEYOND THE COMPREHENSION OF MORTAL MINDS--AND TO THREATEN GALACTUS WITH THE USE OF THAT WEAPON--
"--FORCING HIM TO RELINQUISH HIS CLAIM ON EARTH FOR ALL TIME.

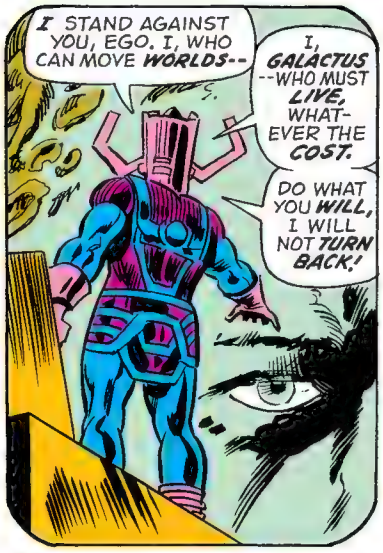

"AS FOR THE SURFER--HE PAID THE PRICE FOR HIS BETRAYAL; GALACTUS CONDEMNED HIM TO ETERNAL EXILE ON EARTH--AND REMOVED HIS SPACE-TIME TRAVELING POWERS--
"--FOR THE WRATH OF GALACTUS IS SURE, AND PAINFULLY SWIFT."
I SEE.
THOU DIDST FACE HIM THYSELF, DIDST THOU NOT?
I DID, AS THOR--BUT AGAIN, THE BATTLE WAS INCONCLUSIVE.
TRY TO UNDERSTAND, HERCULES...
...GALACTUS' TRUE STRENGTH HAS NEVER BEEN TESTED.
IF IT EVER IS, I WONDER IF ANYONE--MAN OR GOD--COULD STAND AGAINST HIM.
AND, MY FRIEND, IN A MATTER OF HOURS, OR DAYS--WE'LL FIND OUT.
OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS, SPECULATION RUNS WILD ACROSS THE EARTH, AS THE RUMOR OF GALACTUS' APPROACH BECOMES AN HYSTERICAL WARNING--
UNTIL, EXACTLY ONE HUNDRED HOURS AFTER THE FIRELORD'S SIGNAL REACHES ACROSS THE HEAVENS--A GLISTENING GLOBE APPEARS IN THE SPACE BEYOND PLUTO.
--AND ALL QUESTION OF THE SPACE-GOD'S INTENTIONS IS SHOVED ASIDE--
--AS GALACTUS DESCENDS--TOWARD THE GRAY-GREEN HILLS OF EARTH.
LIKE A SECOND SUN, IT GROWS IN THE TWILIGHT SKY, FILLING THAT SKY WITH BRILLIANCE--
--TURNING NIGHT INTO DAY--
--AND FOR A THOUSAND BILLION SOULS--MARKING THE DAWN OF THE APOCALYPSE!
THERE'S NOWHERE WE CAN RUN! HE'S HERE, HEAVEN HELP US--
HE'S HERE!


AND, INDEED... GALACTUS HAS ARRIVED!

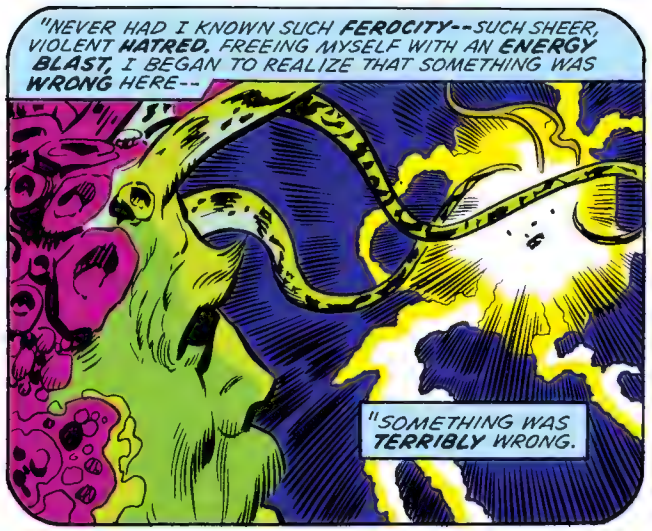
AWAY FROM ME, PUNY HUMANS. YOUR PITIABLE LIVES DO NOT INTEREST ME THIS DAY.
I COME IN SEARCH OF THOR, WHO CALLS HIMSELF A GOD OF THUNDER--
--AND IT SEEMS MY SEARCH HAS BEEN REWARDED, AT LONG LAST.
SO, VILLAIN--WE MEET AGAIN, ONCE MORE TO DO COMBAT.
THIS TIME, ODIN SHALL NOT STAY MY HAND*--
THIS TIME, THOU SHALT FALL!
*AS HE DID IN THOR #169.--ROY.
WAIT, ASGARDIAN--WE HAVE NO QUARREL.
I COME TO SPEAK WITH YOU--NOT TO BATTLE.
THE MONSTER LIES, THOR. LET ME FORCE THE TRUTH FROM HIS LIPS--
HE'LL NOT STAND LONG 'GAINST HERCULES!
HOLD, MY FRIEND. LET US HEAR HIM.
GALACTUS IS MANY THINGS--BUT NOT A LIAR.
I THANK YOU FOR THAT, ASGARDIAN. IT SEEMS YOU HAVEN'T COMPLETELY FORGOTTEN OUR LAST MEETING--
--AND WHAT I TOLD YOU THEN OF MY LIFE-LONG AGONY.
BUT MY PAST IS NOT YOUR CONCERN, OR TRULY MINE. THERE IS A MENACE ABROAD IN THE UNIVERSE, BEFORE WHICH EVEN I STAND POWERLESS--
"--THE MAD LIVING PLANET--CALLED EGO!


"YOU MAY RECALL THAT ONCE, I TRIED TO CONQUER THAT WORLD--TO DESTROY IT, AND THUS TO FEED ON ITS BIOLOGICAL ENERGIES. YOU STOOD WITH EGO IN THAT BATTLE*, AND BETWEEN YOU--YOU DEFEATED ME, FOR A TIME--
"AND FOR A TIME, I AVOIDED EGO--UNTIL MY NEED FOR LIFE-ENERGY BECAME TOO GREAT--
*SHOWN IN THOR #161. --ROY.

"--AND I FACED THE LIVING PLANET ONCE MORE.
HUMANOID FOOL! HAVEN'T YOU YET LEARNED?
NONE MAY STAND AGAINST EGO--AND SURVIVE!

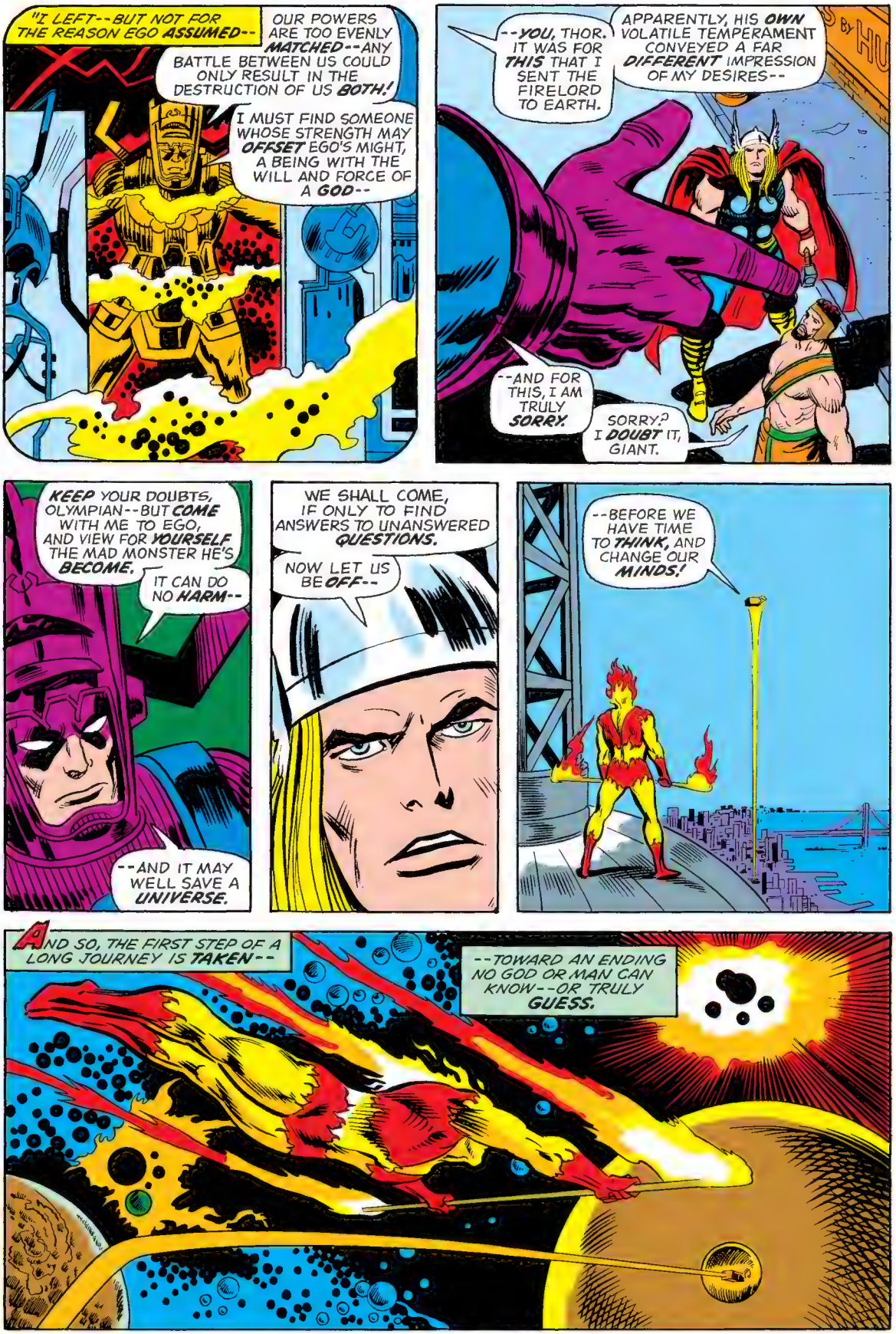

I STAND AGAINST YOU, EGO. I, WHO CAN MOVE WORLDS--
I, GALACTUS --WHO MUST LIVE, WHATEVER THE COST.
DO WHAT YOU WILL, I WILL NOT TURN BACK!

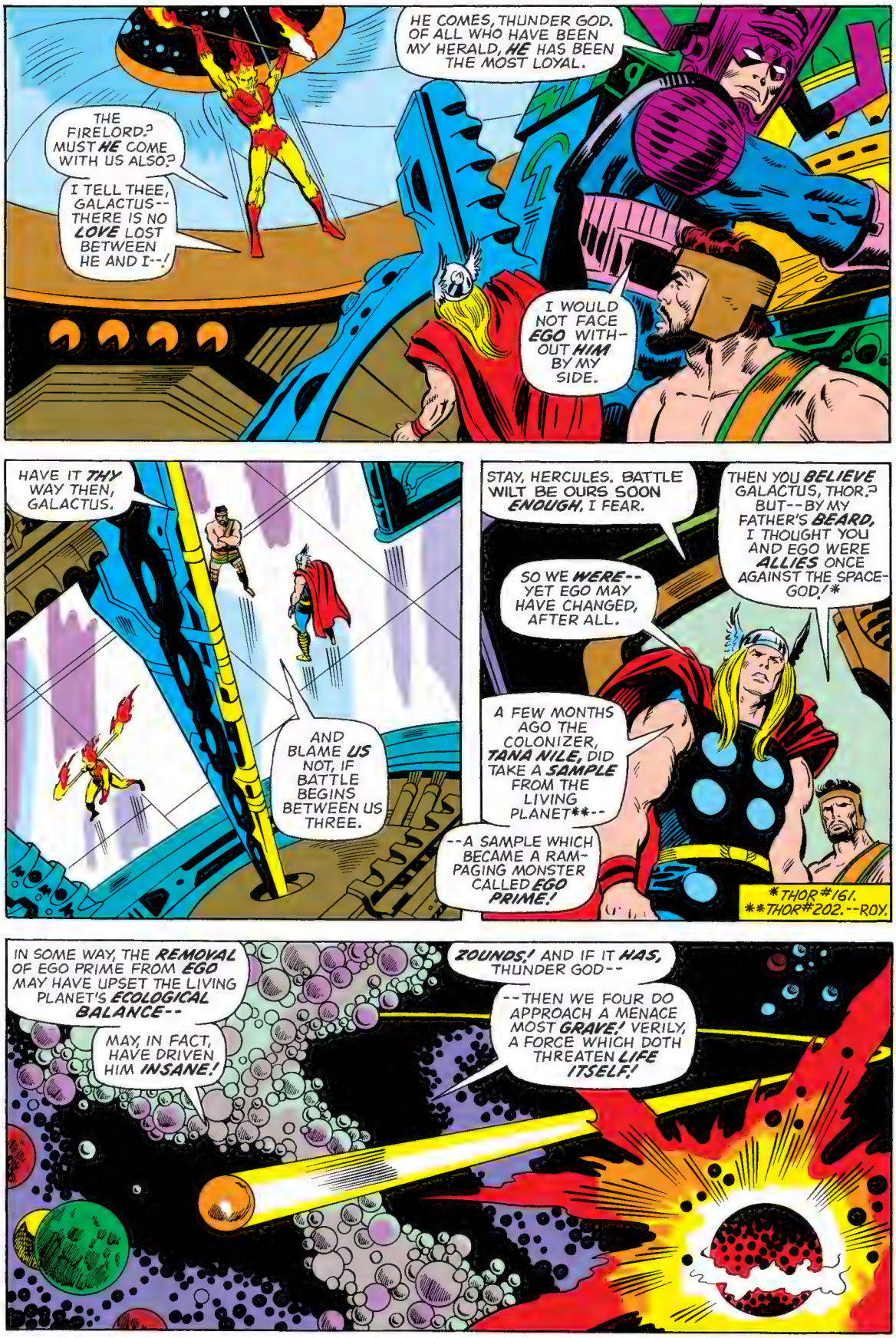
THEN YOU WILL DIE, YOU ANTHROPOMORPHIC IMBECILE!
YOU WILL DIE--AS ALL HUMANOIDS WILL SOMEDAY DIE--
--BEFORE THE MIGHT OF EGO!

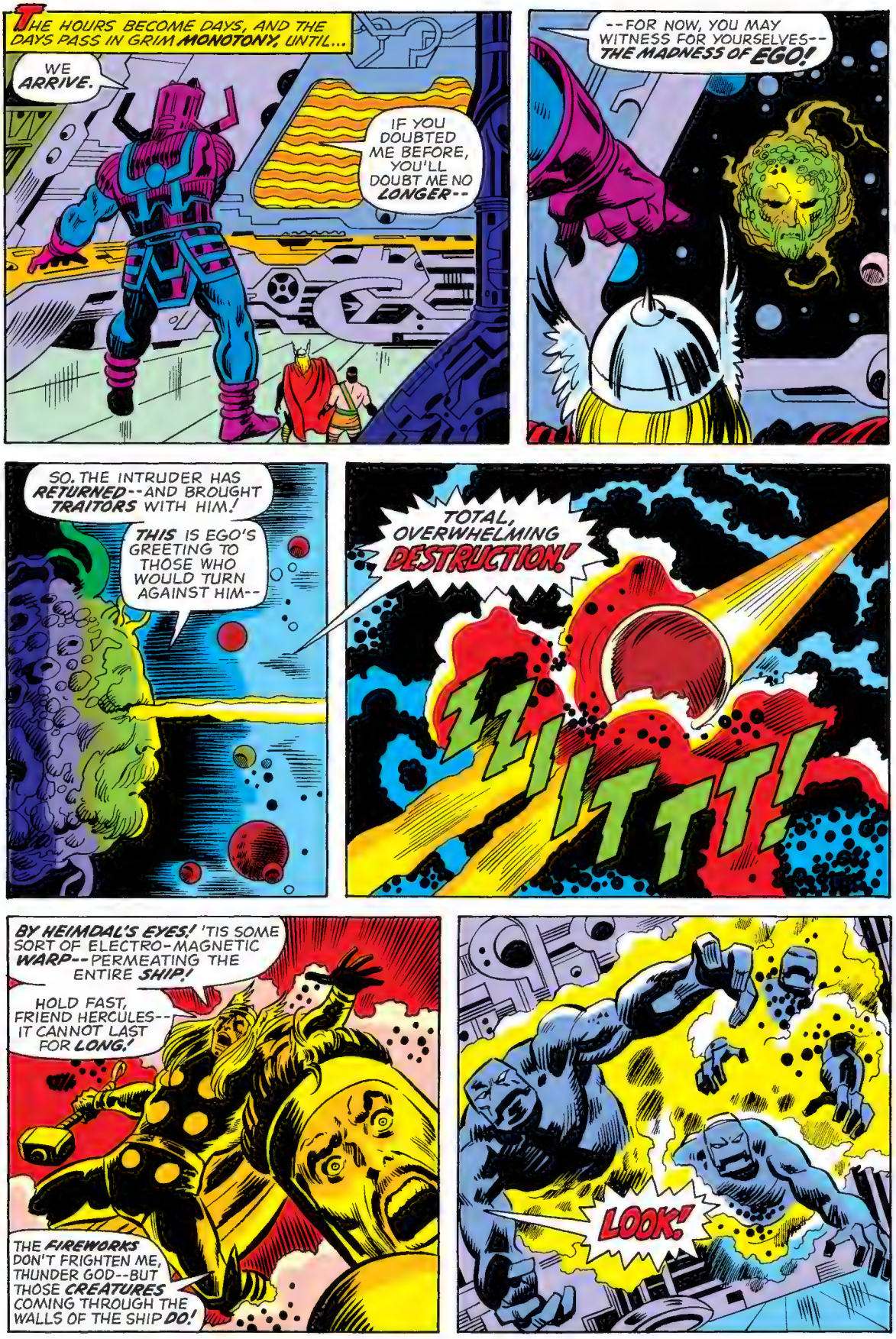

"NEVER HAD I KNOWN SUCH FEROCITY--SUCH SHEER, VIOLENT HATRED. FREEING MYSELF WITH AN ENERGY BLAST, I BEGAN TO REALIZE THAT SOMETHING WAS WRONG HERE--
"SOMETHING WAS TERRIBLY WRONG.

"TO GIVE MYSELF TIME TO THINK, I LAUNCHED A BARRAGE OF COMETS AT THE LIVING PLANET--
"--KNOWING FULL WELL EGO COULD AND WOULD AVOID THEM--!

BRAINLESS PUP! YOU THINK YOUR POWERS CAN EVEN COMPARE TO MINE? WHAT MATTER YOUR PETTY COMETS TO ME--
--WHEN I CAN TURN MY PLANETARY SURFACE TO ICE, AND SO ABSORB YOUR COSMIC FIREBALLS--
--AND SEND THEIR POWER BACK AT YOU-- AS ONLY EGO CAN!
I WARN YOU, SPACE-GOD... YOUR TIME WILL COME ALL THE SOONER, IF YOU CONTINUE YOUR FUTILE ATTACK.
IF YOU VALUE YOUR PATHETIC LIFE, FLEE NOW--
--AND GAIN YOURSELF A FEW MORE MONTHS OF EXISTENCE, BEFORE THE CURTAIN FALLS ON YOUR PERSONAL DRAMA--FOREVER!
"NEVER HAD I FELT SUCH POWER. NEVER HAD I FELT SUCH RAGE.
"IT EQUALED --NO, SURPASSED MY OWN. BEFORE EGO, I HAD BECOME NO MORE THAN A DUST MOTE--
"--AND FOR THIS, AND ONE OTHER, GREATER REASON, I DID AT LAST TURN AWAY--AND SUFFERED EGO'S ECHOING MOCKERY.
VERY GOOD, GALACTUS-- RUN! RUN FROM YOUR MASTER!
SOON, THE UNIVERSE ITSELF WILL SCURRY BEFORE ME--
--AND EGO WILL RULE OVER ALL!


"I LEFT--BUT NOT FOR THE REASON EGO ASSUMED--
OUR POWERS ARE TOO EVENLY MATCHED--ANY BATTLE BETWEEN US COULD ONLY RESULT IN THE DESTRUCTION OF US BOTH!
I MUST FIND SOMEONE WHOSE STRENGTH MAY OFFSET EGO'S MIGHT, A BEING WITH THE WILL AND FORCE OF A GOD--
--YOU, THOR. IT WAS FOR THIS THAT I SENT THE FIRELORD TO EARTH.
APPARENTLY, HIS OWN VOLATILE TEMPERAMENT CONVEYED A FAR DIFFERENT IMPRESSION OF MY DESIRES--
--AND FOR THIS, I AM TRULY SORRY.
SORRY? I DOUBT IT, GIANT.
KEEP YOUR DOUBTS, OLYMPIAN--BUT COME WITH ME TO EGO, AND VIEW FOR YOURSELF THE MAD MONSTER HE'S BECOME.
IT CAN DO NO HARM--
--AND IT MAY WELL SAVE A UNIVERSE.
WE SHALL COME, IF ONLY TO FIND ANSWERS TO UNANSWERED QUESTIONS.
NOW LET US BE OFF--
--BEFORE WE HAVE TIME TO THINK, AND CHANGE OUR MINDS!
AND SO, THE FIRST STEP OF A LONG JOURNEY IS TAKEN--
--TOWARD AN ENDING NO GOD OR MAN CAN KNOW--OR TRULY GUESS.


HE COMES, THUNDER GOD. OF ALL WHO HAVE BEEN MY HERALD, HE HAS BEEN THE MOST LOYAL.
THE FIRELORD? MUST HE COME WITH US ALSO?
I TELL THEE, GALACTUS-- THERE IS NO LOVE LOST BETWEEN HE AND I--!
I WOULD NOT FACE EGO WITH-OUT HIM BY MY SIDE.
HAVE IT THY WAY THEN, GALACTUS.
AND BLAME US NOT, IF BATTLE BEGINS BETWEEN US THREE.
STAY, HERCULES. BATTLE WILT BE OURS SOON ENOUGH, I FEAR.
THEN YOU BELIEVE GALACTUS, THOR? BUT--BY MY FATHER'S BEARD, I THOUGHT YOU AND EGO WERE ALLIES ONCE AGAINST THE SPACE-GOD!*
SO WE WERE-- YET EGO MAY HAVE CHANGED, AFTER ALL.
A FEW MONTHS AGO THE COLONIZER, TANA NILE, DID TAKE A SAMPLE FROM THE LIVING PLANET**--
--A SAMPLE WHICH BECAME A RAM-PAGING MONSTER CALLED EGO PRIME!
*THOR #161.
**THOR #202.--ROY.
IN SOME WAY, THE REMOVAL OF EGO PRIME FROM EGO MAY HAVE UPSET THE LIVING PLANET'S ECOLOGICAL BALANCE--
MAY, IN FACT, HAVE DRIVEN HIM INSANE!
ZOUNDS! AND IF IT HAS, THUNDER GOD--
--THEN WE FOUR DO APPROACH A MENACE MOST GRAVE! VERILY, A FORCE WHICH DOTH THREATEN LIFE ITSELF!


THE HOURS BECOME DAYS, AND THE DAYS PASS IN GRIM MONOTONY, UNTIL...
WE ARRIVE.
IF YOU DOUBTED ME BEFORE, YOU'LL DOUBT ME NO LONGER--
--FOR NOW, YOU MAY WITNESS FOR YOURSELVES-- THE MADNESS OF EGO!
SO. THE INTRUDER HAS RETURNED--AND BROUGHT TRAITORS WITH HIM!
THIS IS EGO'S GREETING TO THOSE WHO WOULD TURN AGAINST HIM--
TOTAL, OVERWHELMING DESTRUCTION!
IIIITTT!
BY HEIMDAL'S EYES! 'TIS SOME SORT OF ELECTRO-MAGNETIC WARP--PERMEATING THE ENTIRE SHIP!
HOLD FAST, FRIEND HERCULES--IT CANNOT LAST FOR LONG!
THE FIREWORKS DON'T FRIGHTEN ME, THUNDER GOD--BUT THOSE CREATURES COMING THROUGH THE WALLS OF THE SHIP DO!
LOOK!

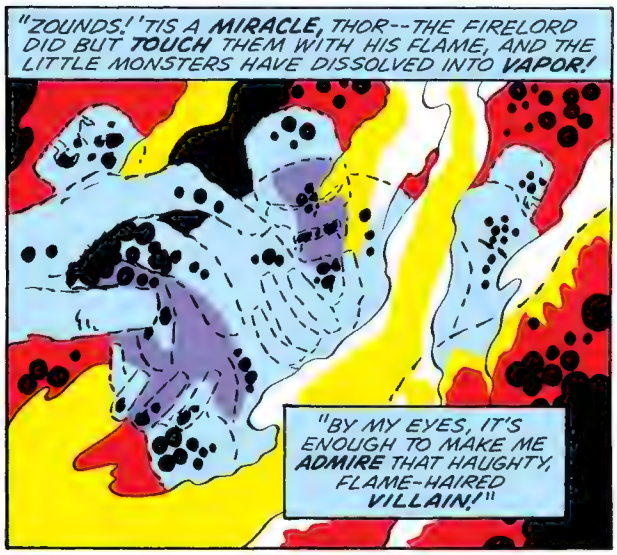
NOT THROUGH THE WALLS, HERCULES: THESE CREATURES ARE PART OF THE WALLS, FORMED FROM THE VERY FABRIC OF THE SHIP ITSELF!
WATCH THYSELF, LEST THEY-- MMMPPPHHH
WHAT ELSE WOULD THOU HAVE ME DO, ASGARDIAN?
STAND AND LET THESE DWARVES OVERRUN ME? HO, FIRELORD-- WHAT OF THEE?
WILL THOU STAND OR ATTACK--?
IF ATTACK, THEN ATTACK QUICKLY!
MASTER, THE DEMONS SEEM TOO MUCH FOR OUR GODLIKE COMPANIONS--
CAN YOU HELP--OR MUST WE BATTLE THEM ALONE?
I CAN DO NOTHING, FIRELORD, WHILE THESE MONSTERS ATTACK YOU--EGO ATTACKS ME!
ALL MY STRENGTH IS REQUIRED TO KEEP THIS SHIP ON COURSE--
IF I LET UP FOR AN INSTANT--WE'LL BE LOST!
THEN STAND FAST, GALACTUS!
THESE CREATURES WILL BE DISPATCHED--
NOW

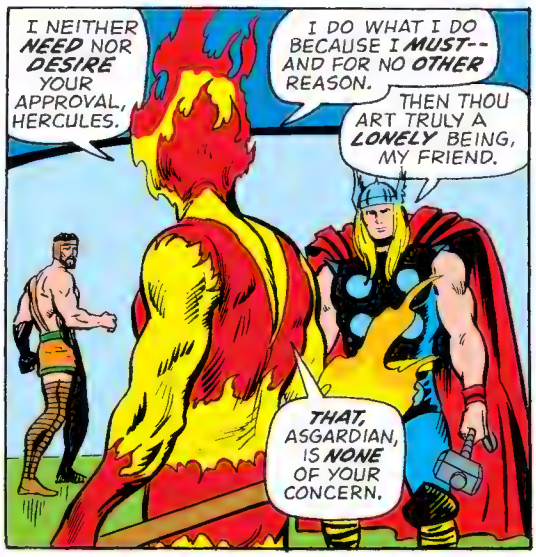
CLUB!

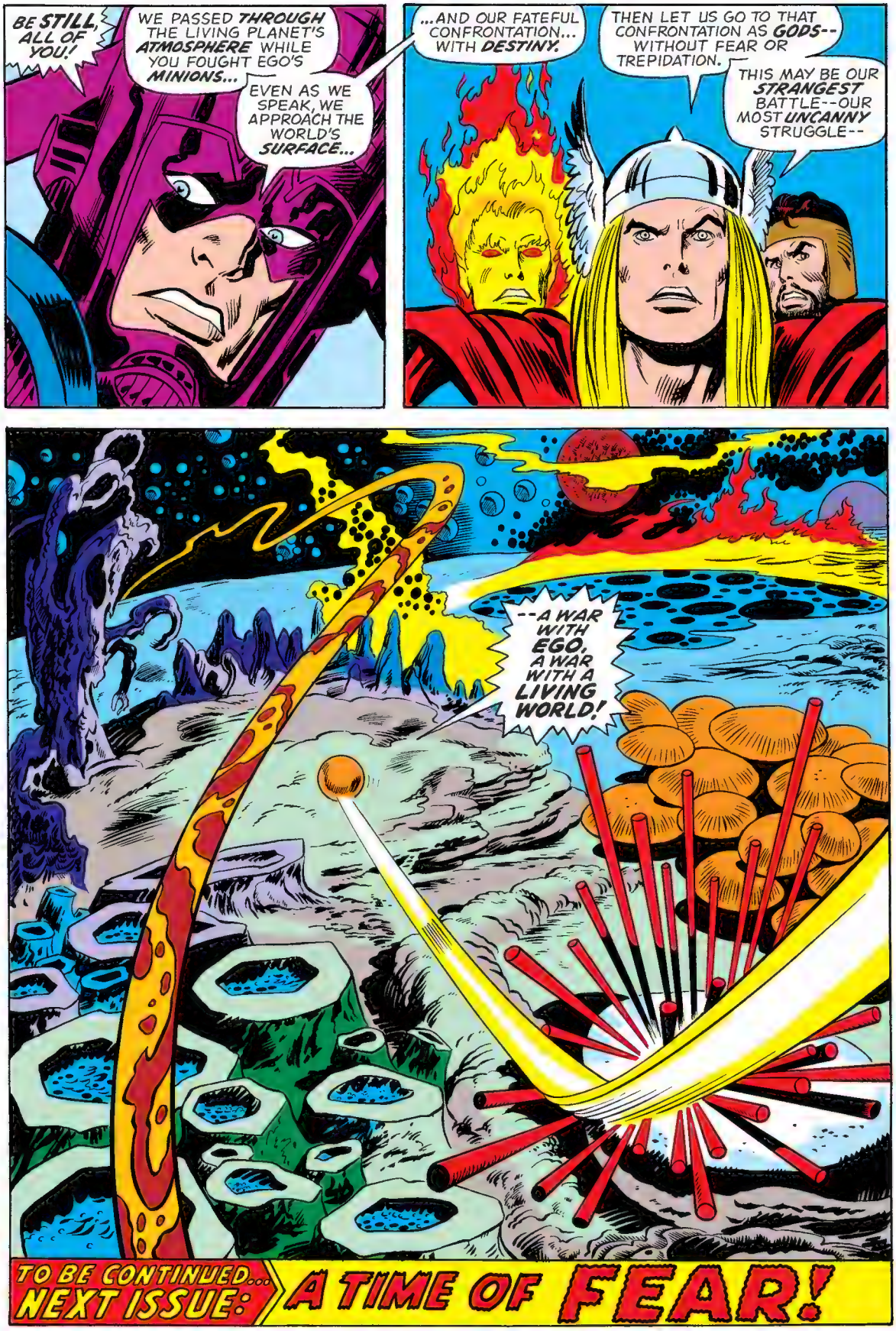
BY THE EVERLASTING STARS, THUNDER GOD!
NO MATTER HOW OFTEN WE STRIKE--THE DEMONS KEEP RETURNING! IN TRUTH, THEY CANNOT BE TIRED!

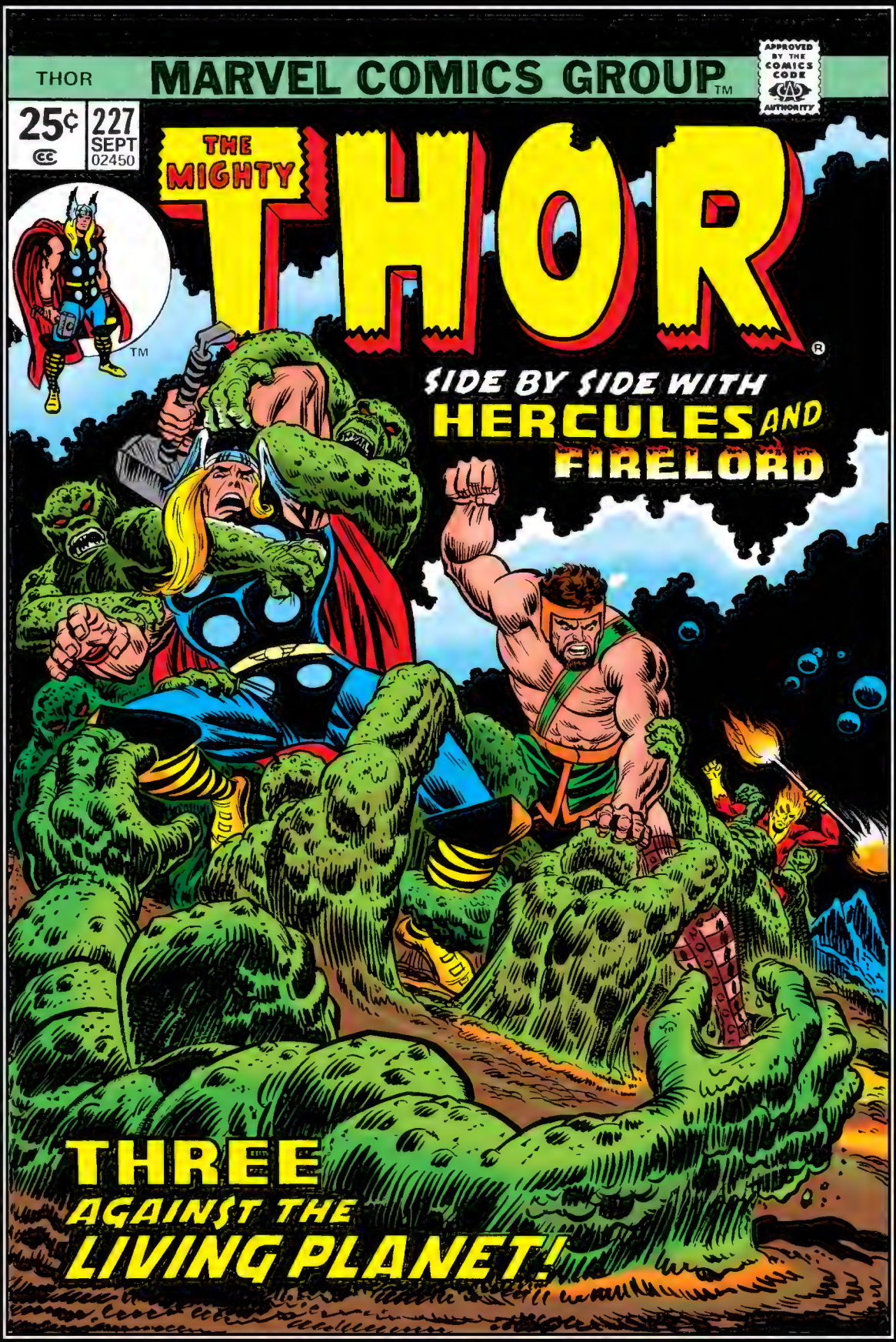
THEN LET'S NOT TRY TO TIRE THEM, HERCULES.
LET'S SIMPLY DISPOSE OF THEM--
--THROUGH THE COSMIC FLAME OF THE FIRESTAFF!

SHEEEESH!


"ZOUNDS! 'TIS A MIRACLE, THOR--THE FIRELORD DID BUT TOUCH THEM WITH HIS FLAME, AND THE LITTLE MONSTERS HAVE DISSOLVED INTO VAPOR!
"BY MY EYES, IT'S ENOUGH TO MAKE ME ADMIRE THAT HAUGHTY, FLAME-HAIRED VILLAIN!"


I NEITHER NEED NOR DESIRE YOUR APPROVAL, HERCULES.
I DO WHAT I DO BECAUSE I MUST--AND FOR NO OTHER REASON.
THEN THOU ART TRULY A LONELY BEING, MY FRIEND.
THAT, ASGARDIAN, IS NONE OF YOUR CONCERN.


BE STILL, ALL OF YOU!
WE PASSED THROUGH THE LIVING PLANET'S ATMOSPHERE WHILE YOU FOUGHT EGO'S MINIONS...
EVEN AS WE SPEAK, WE APPROACH THE WORLD'S SURFACE...
...AND OUR FATEFUL CONFRONTATION... WITH DESTINY.
THEN LET US GO TO THAT CONFRONTATION AS GODS-- WITHOUT FEAR OR TREPIDATION.
THIS MAY BE OUR STRANGEST BATTLE--OUR MOST UNCANNY STRUGGLE--
--A WAR WITH EGO, A WAR WITH A LIVING WORLD!
TO BE CONTINUED... NEXT ISSUE:
A TIME OF FEAR!


THOR
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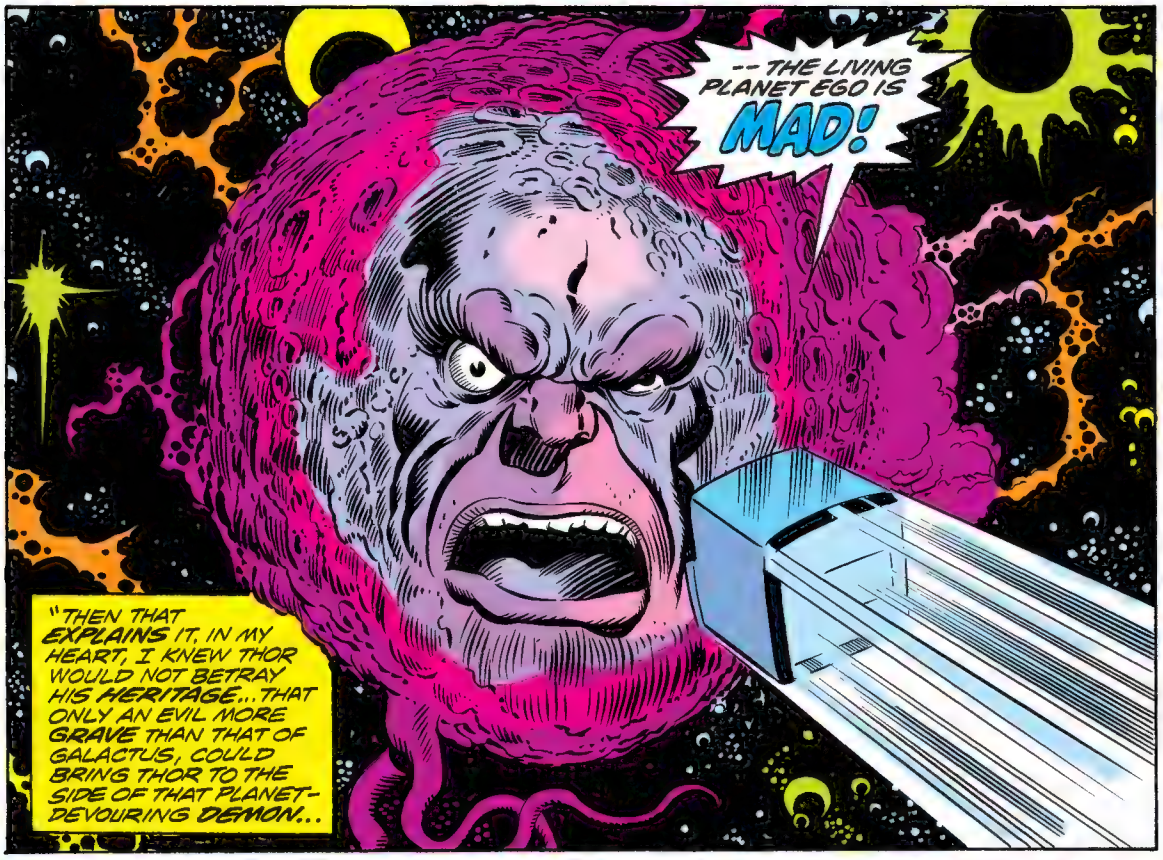
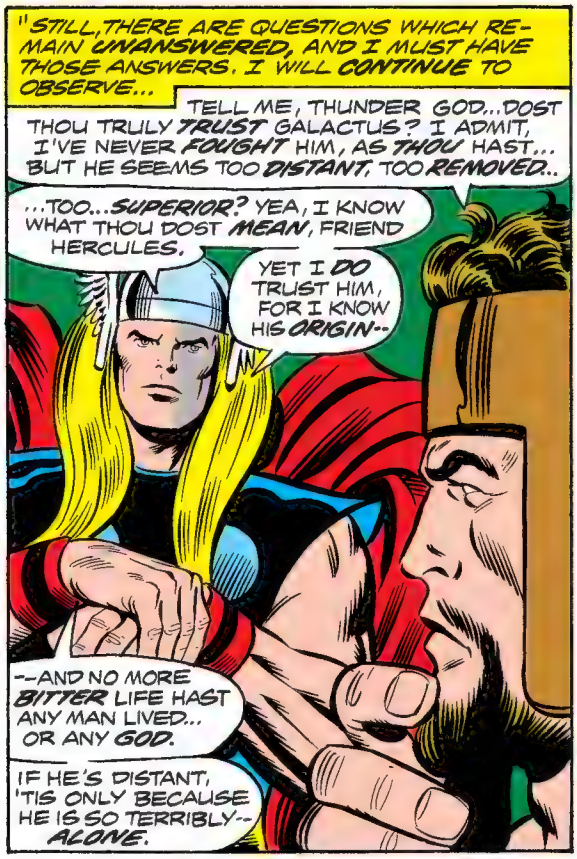
THE MIGHTY
THOR®
SIDE BY SIDE WITH
HERCULES AND
FIRELORD
THREE
AGAINST THE
LIVING PLANET!

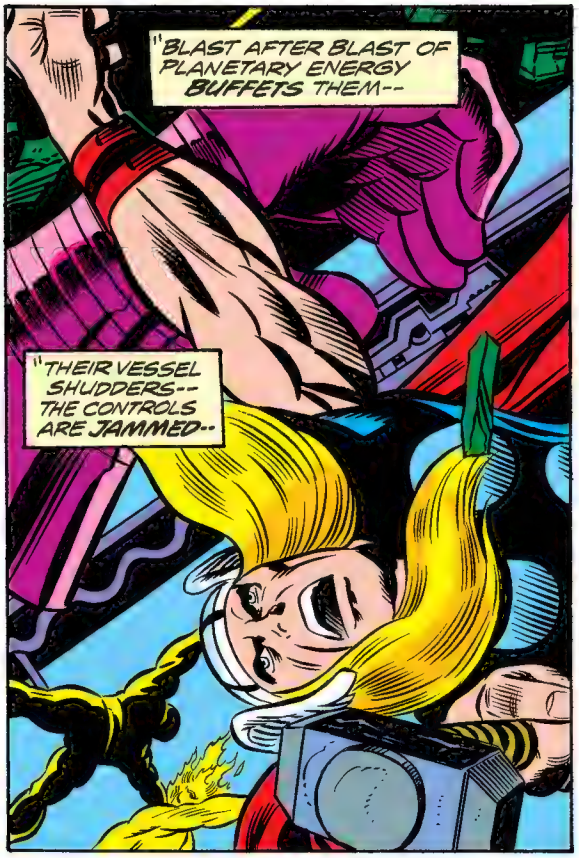
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE MIGHTY THOR!™
IN SEARCH OF... EGO!
IN TRUTH, THERE IS A MYSTERY HERE.
WHY HAS THOR, HE WHO IS MY BELOVED SON, JOINED FORCES WITH GALACTUS--THE MOST DANGEROUS ENTITY IN ALL SPACE AND TIME?
I MUST KNOW THE ANSWER--ELSE ALL THE UNIVERSE MAY BE DESTROYED!
AND NOW, A RETURN TO FORMER GLORY--PRODUCED IN ALL ITS POMP AND PANOPLY BY:
GERRY CONWAY writer * RICH BUCKLER artist
INKING: JOE SINNOTT
lettering: JOHN COSTANZA
coloring: P. GOLDBERG
ROY THOMAS EDITOR

EVEN AS I WATCH, THE INTERSTELLAR VESSEL CONTAINING MY SON AND HIS ALLIES SWOOPS ABOVE THE SURFACE OF THE LIVING PLANET, EGO.
WHAT PURPOSE HAVE THEY IN APPROACHING THAT WORLD? I MUST KNOW MORE, BEFORE I CAN MAKE A DECISION...
...FOR IT MUST NEVER BE SAID THAT ALL-FATHER ODIN DID ACT WITHOUT KNOWING THE CONSEQUENCE OF HIS INTERFERENCE!
"AH, MY MONITOR NOW TURNS ITS GAZE TO THE SCENE WITHIN THE VESSEL... AND INDEED, IT IS GALACTUS WHOM I SEE... GALACTUS, WHO ONCE DARED THREATEN ASGARD ITSELF...!
WE NEAR THE SURFACE, THUNDER GOD.
HAVE YOU DECIDED? DO YOU STAND WITH GALACTUS--OR AGAINST HIM?
WITH THEE, SPACE-GOD. THOU HAST CONVINCED ME THAT THY CAUSE IS A JUST ONE--
YEA, TO THE END OF TIME!
--AND THUS, THOR WILL FOLLOW THEE, AND FIGHT BY THY SIDE--!
"DO MINE EARS DECEIVE ME? HAS MY SON SWORN ALLEGIANCE TO THIS MONSTER? BY THE FLAMES OF RAGNAROK, I SWEAR HE'LL FEEL MY WRATH--BUT WAIT--
"--GALACTUS SPEAKS--!
THEN WE MUST STAND FIRM, ASGARDIAN--FOR THE POWER OF EGO IS GREAT, PERHAPS GREATER THAN ALL OUR POWER COMBINED.
GREATER EVEN THAN THE STRENGTH OF HERCULES, VAST ONE?
PERHAPS SO, OLYMPIAN. THE INSANE SOMETIMES HAVE POWER BEYOND THEIR NORMAL ABILITIES--AND MAKE NO MISTAKE--


-- THE LIVING PLANET EGO IS MAD!
"THEN THAT EXPLAINS IT, IN MY HEART, I KNEW THOR WOULD NOT BETRAY HIS HERITAGE... THAT ONLY AN EVIL MORE GRAVE THAN THAT OF GALACTUS, COULD BRING THOR TO THE SIDE OF THAT PLANET-DEVOURING DEMON...

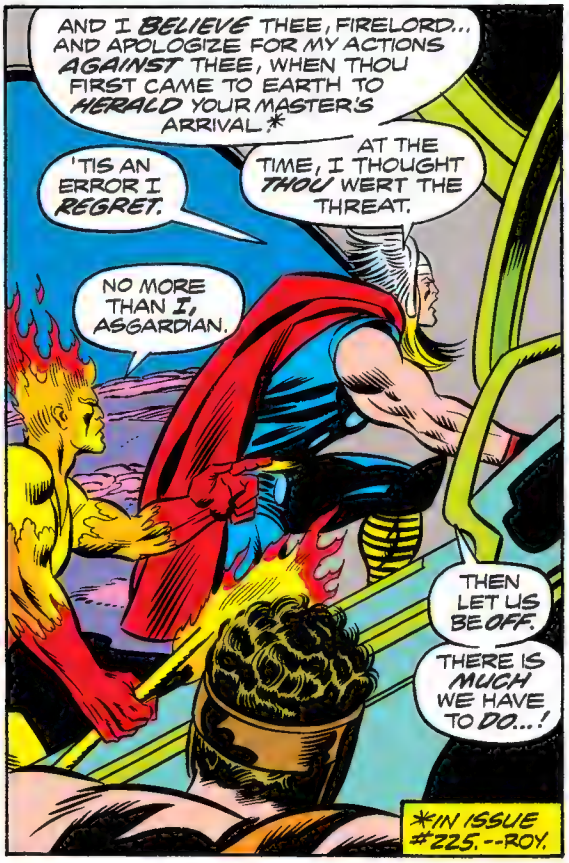

"STILL, THERE ARE QUESTIONS WHICH REMAIN UNANSWERED, AND I MUST HAVE THOSE ANSWERS. I WILL CONTINUE TO OBSERVE...
TELL ME, THUNDER GOD... DOST THOU TRULY TRUST GALACTUS? I ADMIT, I'VE NEVER FOUGHT HIM, AS THOU HAST... BUT HE SEEMS TOO DISTANT, TOO REMOVED..
...TOO... SUPERIOR? YEA, I KNOW WHAT THOU DOST MEAN, FRIEND HERCULES.
YET I DO TRUST HIM, FOR I KNOW HIS ORIGIN--
--AND NO MORE BITTER LIFE HAST ANY MAN LIVED... OR ANY GOD.
IF HE'S DISTANT, 'TIS ONLY BECAUSE HE IS SO TERRIBLY-- ALONE.

"THE MYSTERY DEEPENS. THERE IS MUCH HERE WHICH REQUIRES THOUGHT. MAYHAP IF I WERE TO CONTACT THOR, AND ASK HIM TO--
BAM HOOM
"HEIMDAL'S EYES! THEY ARE ATTACKED!

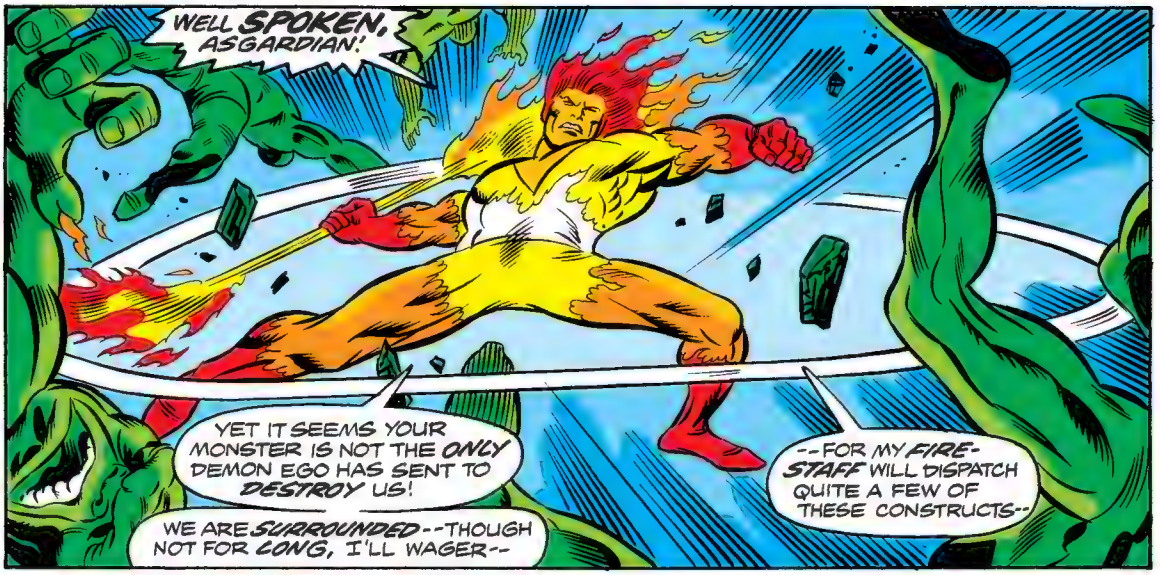

"BLAST AFTER BLAST OF PLANETARY ENERGY BUFFETS THEM--
"THEIR VESSEL SHUDDERS-- THE CONTROLS ARE JAMMED--

"--THEY ARE GOING TO--
KRASH!

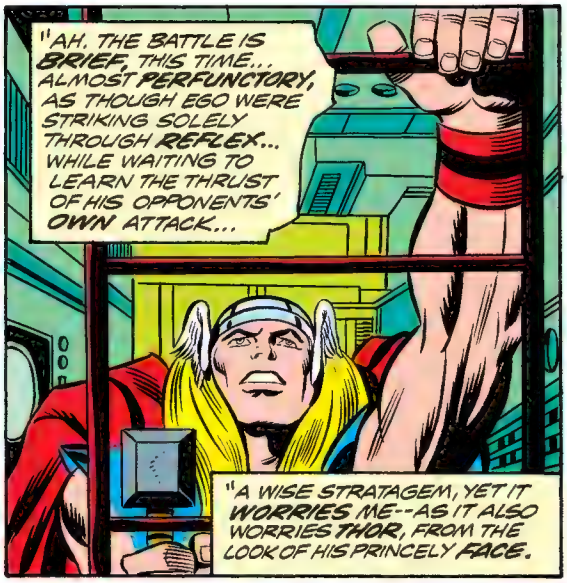
ODIN'S BLOOD! IT SEEMS EGO WAS NOT SATISFIED WITH OUR PROGRESS-- HE HAD TO HASTEN OUR LANDING BY HIS OWN MEANS!
I'M CERTAIN YOU NOW FULLY COMPREHEND THE DANGER, ASGARDIAN.
IF SUCH ENERGY WERE TO BE APPLIED AGAINST THE STARS OF THIS GALAXY--
--WE WOULD ALL PERISH.
MY MASTER SPEAKS THE TRUTH, THUNDER GOD.
I SWEAR IT!

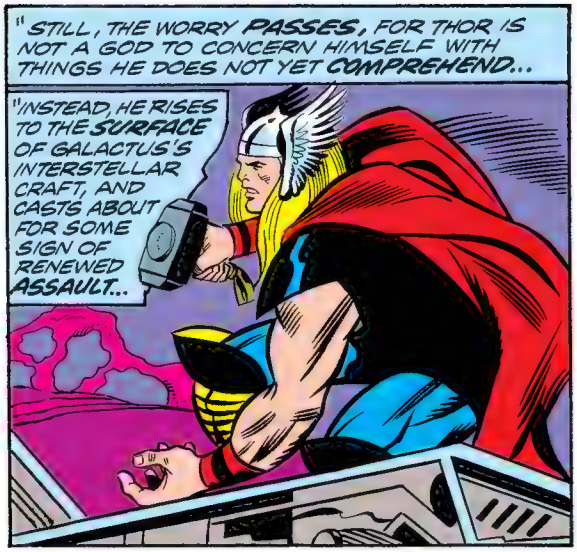

AND I BELIEVE THEE, FIRELORD... AND APOLOGIZE FOR MY ACTIONS AGAINST THEE, WHEN THOU FIRST CAME TO EARTH TO HERALD YOUR MASTER'S ARRIVAL.*
'TIS AN ERROR I REGRET.
AT THE TIME, I THOUGHT THOU WERT THE THREAT.
NO MORE THAN I, ASGARDIAN.
THEN LET US BE OFF.
THERE IS MUCH WE HAVE TO DO...!
*IN ISSUE #225. --ROY.

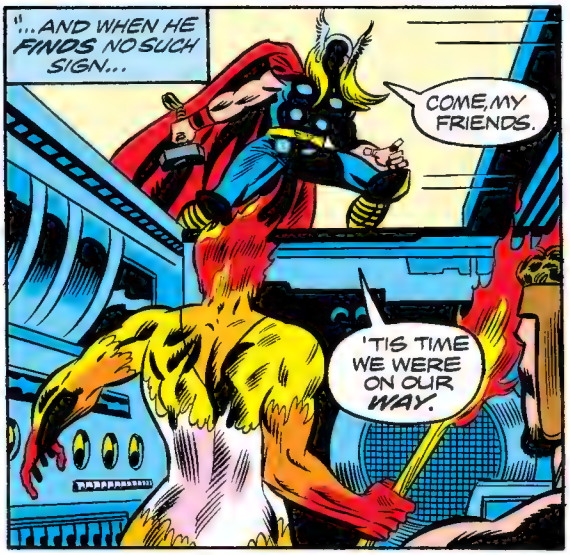
"A BRAVE AND NOBLE SON, ONE I HAVE WRONGED BY MY ANGER. WHEN HE RETURNS, I MUST--
CRUMP!
"ZOUNDS! WHAT NEW DISASTER BEFALLS THEM? YON WALL CRUMPLES LIKE PAPER--
"--AND BEHOLD, ONCE MORE THEY ARE ASSAULTED--NOW, BY A FIERCESOME MONSTER!
YOU DARE APPROACH EGO--FOR THAT, YOU MUST PAY.
FOR THAT--WILL YOU DIE!
STAND BACK, ALL OF THEE.
YON BEAST NEED CONCERN US NO LONGER THAN THE TIME IT TAKES MINE HAMMER TO STRIKE!
AND STRIKE IT SHALL--I SWEAR IT!
AH, SO THE MONSTER DISAGREES.
EGO HAS GIVEN HIM A STREAK OF STUBBORNNESS, AS WELL AS POWER.
YET, THOU SHALT LEARN, DEMON, THAT DETERMINATION ALONE DOES NOT A WAR WIN--
--THOU MUST ALSO HAVE THE WILL--
--AND SUCH A WILL CAN ONLY BE BORN, NOT BUILT!
BAWAK!

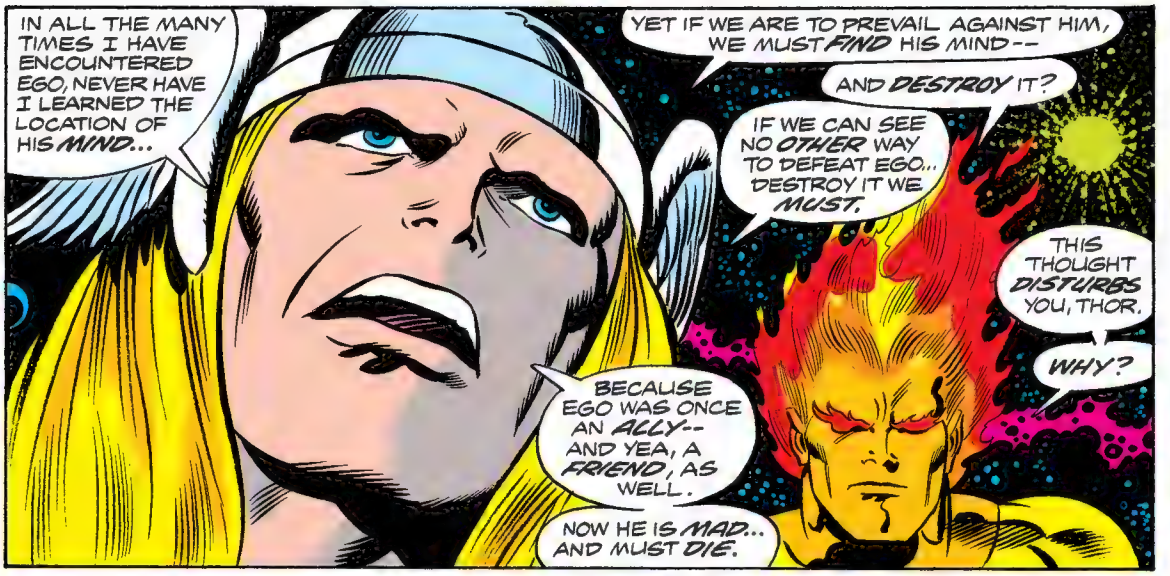

WELL SPOKEN, ASGARDIAN!
YET IT SEEMS YOUR MONSTER IS NOT THE ONLY DEMON EGO HAS SENT TO DESTROY US!
WE ARE SURROUNDED--THOUGH NOT FOR LONG, I'LL WAGER--
--FOR MY FIRE-STAFF WILL DISPATCH QUITE A FEW OF THESE CONSTRUCTS--

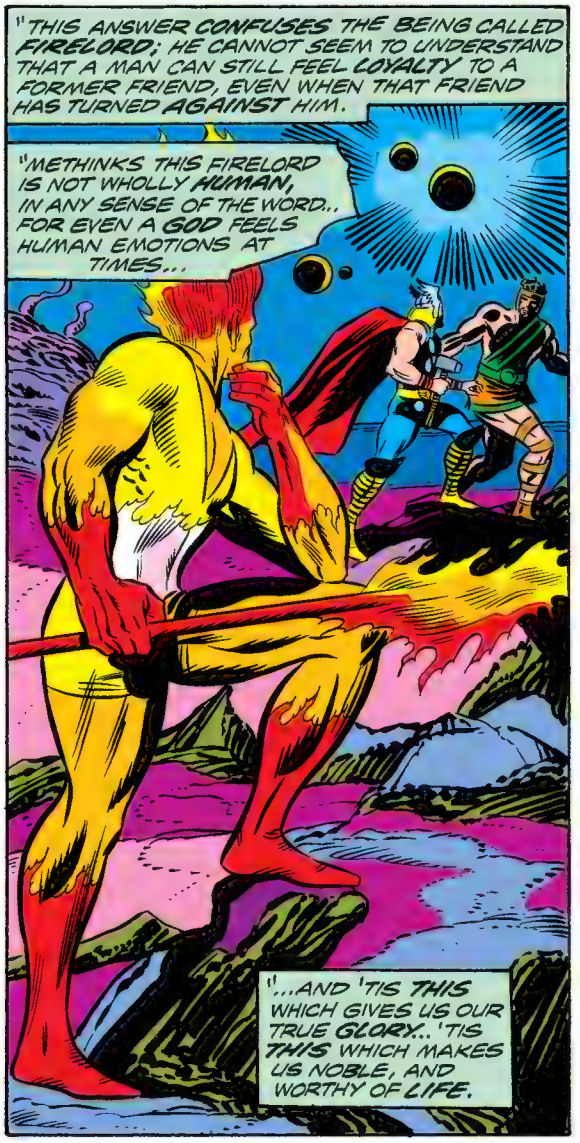
SPAFO!
--AND HERCULES WILL ATTEND TO THE REST!

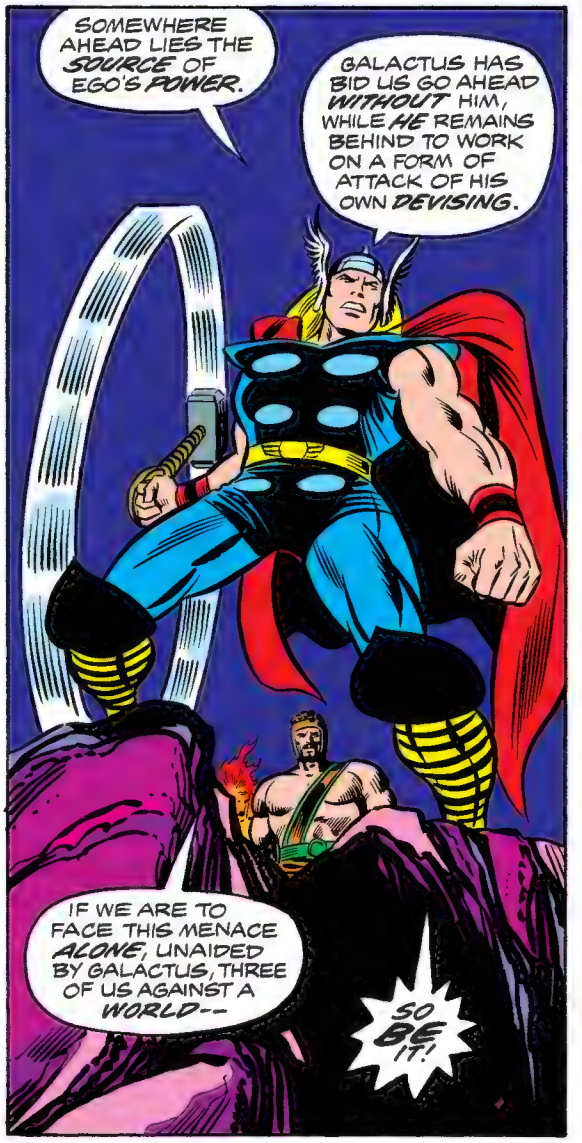

"AH, THE BATTLE IS BRIEF, THIS TIME... ALMOST PERFUNCTORY, AS THOUGH EGO WERE STRIKING SOLELY THROUGH REFLEX... WHILE WAITING TO LEARN THE THRUST OF HIS OPPONENTS' OWN ATTACK...
"A WISE STRATAGEM, YET IT WORRIES ME--AS IT ALSO WORRIES THOR, FROM THE LOOK OF HIS PRINCELY FACE.

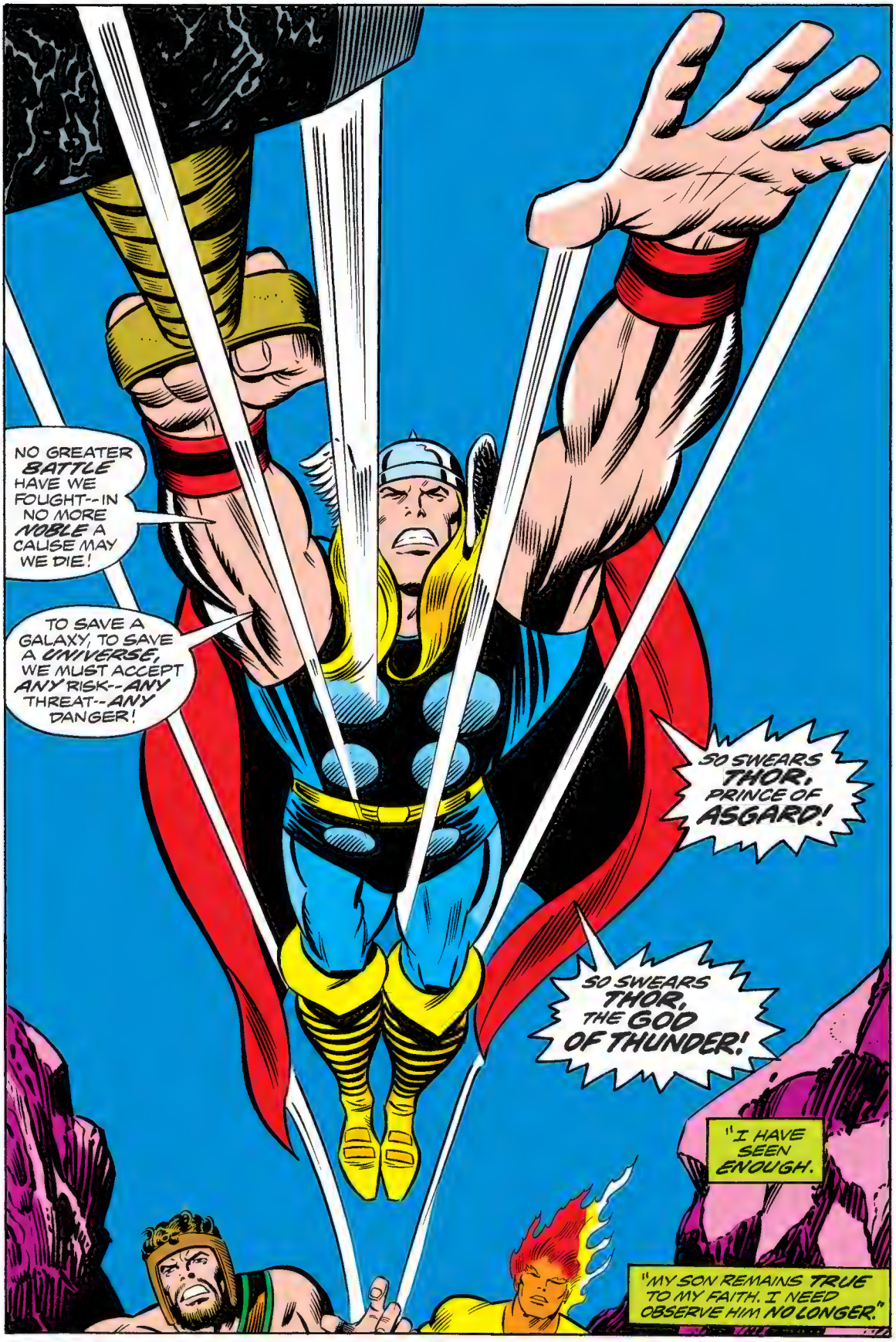

"STILL, THE WORRY PASSES, FOR THOR IS NOT A GOD TO CONCERN HIMSELF WITH THINGS HE DOES NOT YET COMPREHEND...
"INSTEAD, HE RISES TO THE SURFACE OF GALACTUS'S INTERSTELLAR CRAFT, AND CASTS ABOUT FOR SOME SIGN OF RENEWED ASSAULT...


"...AND WHEN HE FINDS NO SUCH SIGN...
COME, MY FRIENDS.
'TIS TIME WE WERE ON OUR WAY.


IN ALL THE MANY TIMES I HAVE ENCOUNTERED EGO, NEVER HAVE I LEARNED THE LOCATION OF HIS MIND...
YET IF WE ARE TO PREVAIL AGAINST HIM, WE MUST FIND HIS MIND--
AND DESTROY IT?
IF WE CAN SEE NO OTHER WAY TO DEFEAT EGO... DESTROY IT WE MUST.
THIS THOUGHT DISTURBS YOU, THOR.
WHY?
BECAUSE EGO WAS ONCE AN ALLY-- AND YEA, A FRIEND, AS WELL.
NOW HE IS MAD... AND MUST DIE.

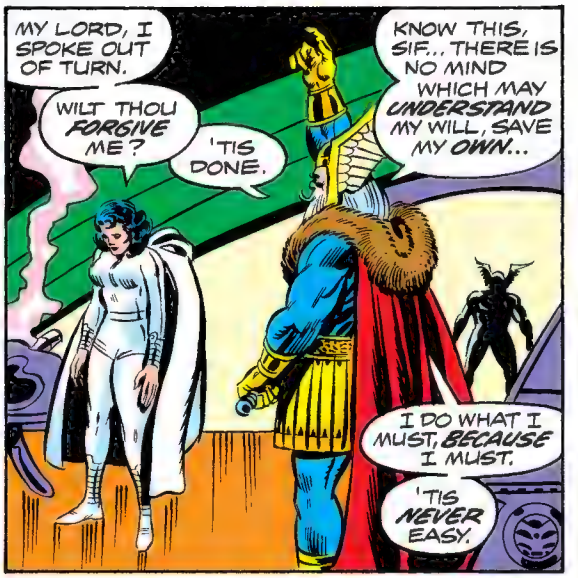

"THIS ANSWER CONFUSES THE BEING CALLED FIRELORD; HE CANNOT SEEM TO UNDERSTAND THAT A MAN CAN STILL FEEL LOYALTY TO A FORMER FRIEND, EVEN WHEN THAT FRIEND HAS TURNED AGAINST HIM.
"METHINKS THIS FIRELORD IS NOT WHOLLY HUMAN, IN ANY SENSE OF THE WORD.. FOR EVEN A GOD FEELS HUMAN EMOTIONS AT TIMES...
"...AND 'TIS THIS WHICH GIVES US OUR TRUE GLORY.. 'TIS THIS WHICH MAKES US NOBLE, AND WORTHY OF LIFE.

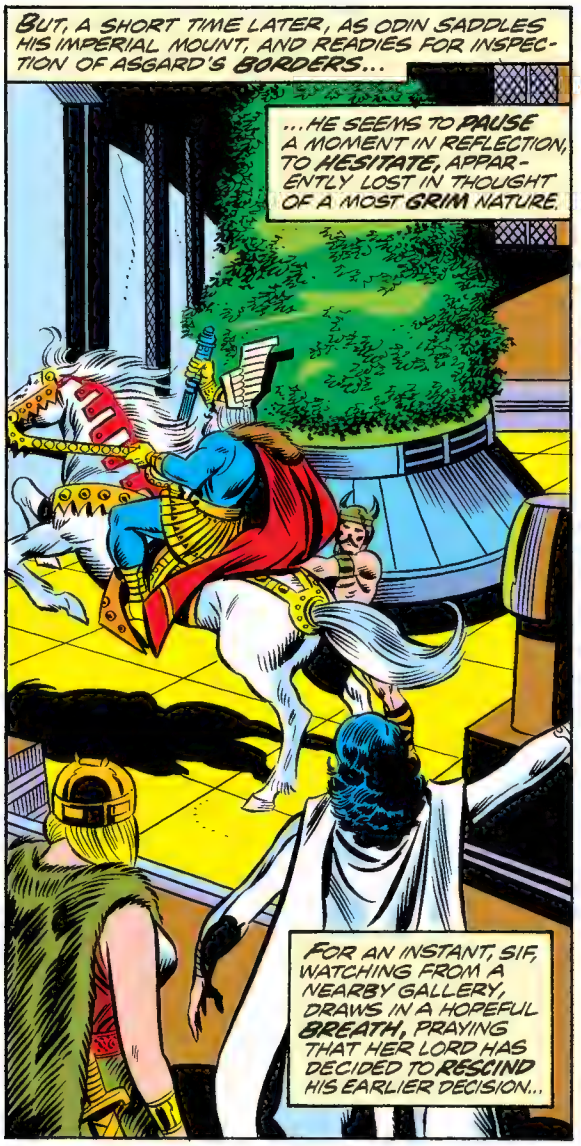

SOMEWHERE AHEAD LIES THE SOURCE OF EGO'S POWER.
GALACTUS HAS BID US GO AHEAD WITHOUT HIM, WHILE HE REMAINS BEHIND TO WORK ON A FORM OF ATTACK OF HIS OWN DEVISING.
IF WE ARE TO FACE THIS MENACE ALONE, UNAIDED BY GALACTUS, THREE OF US AGAINST A WORLD--
SO BE IT!

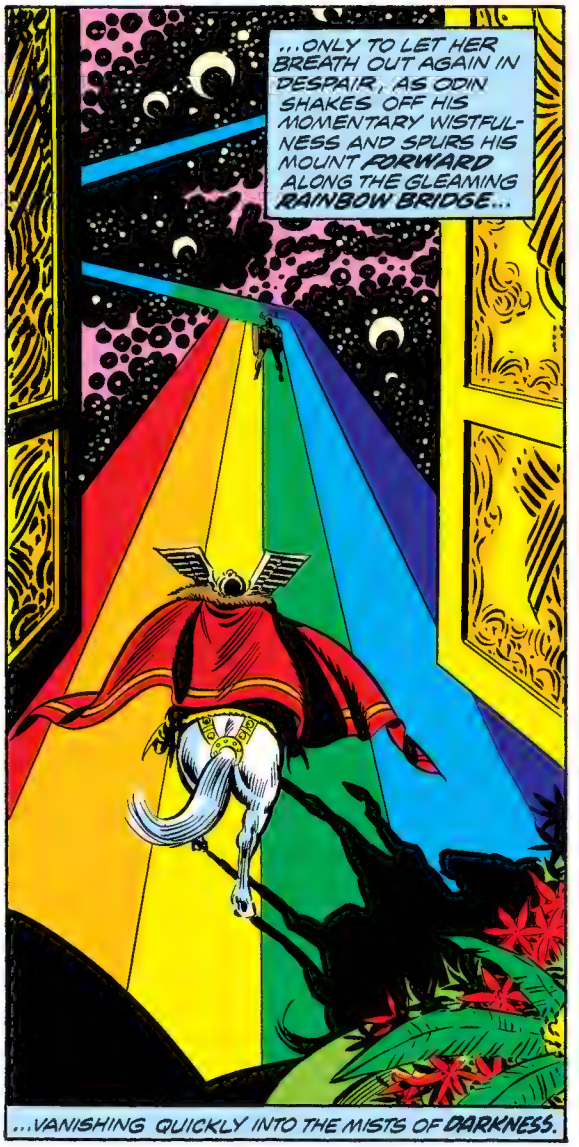

NO GREATER BATTLE HAVE WE FOUGHT--IN NO MORE NOBLE A CAUSE MAY WE DIE!
TO SAVE A GALAXY, TO SAVE A UNIVERSE, WE MUST ACCEPT ANY RISK--ANY THREAT--ANY DANGER!
SO SWEARS THOR, PRINCE OF ASGARD!
SO SWEARS THOR, THE GOD OF THUNDER!
"I HAVE SEEN ENOUGH.
"MY SON REMAINS TRUE TO MY FAITH. I NEED OBSERVE HIM NO LONGER."

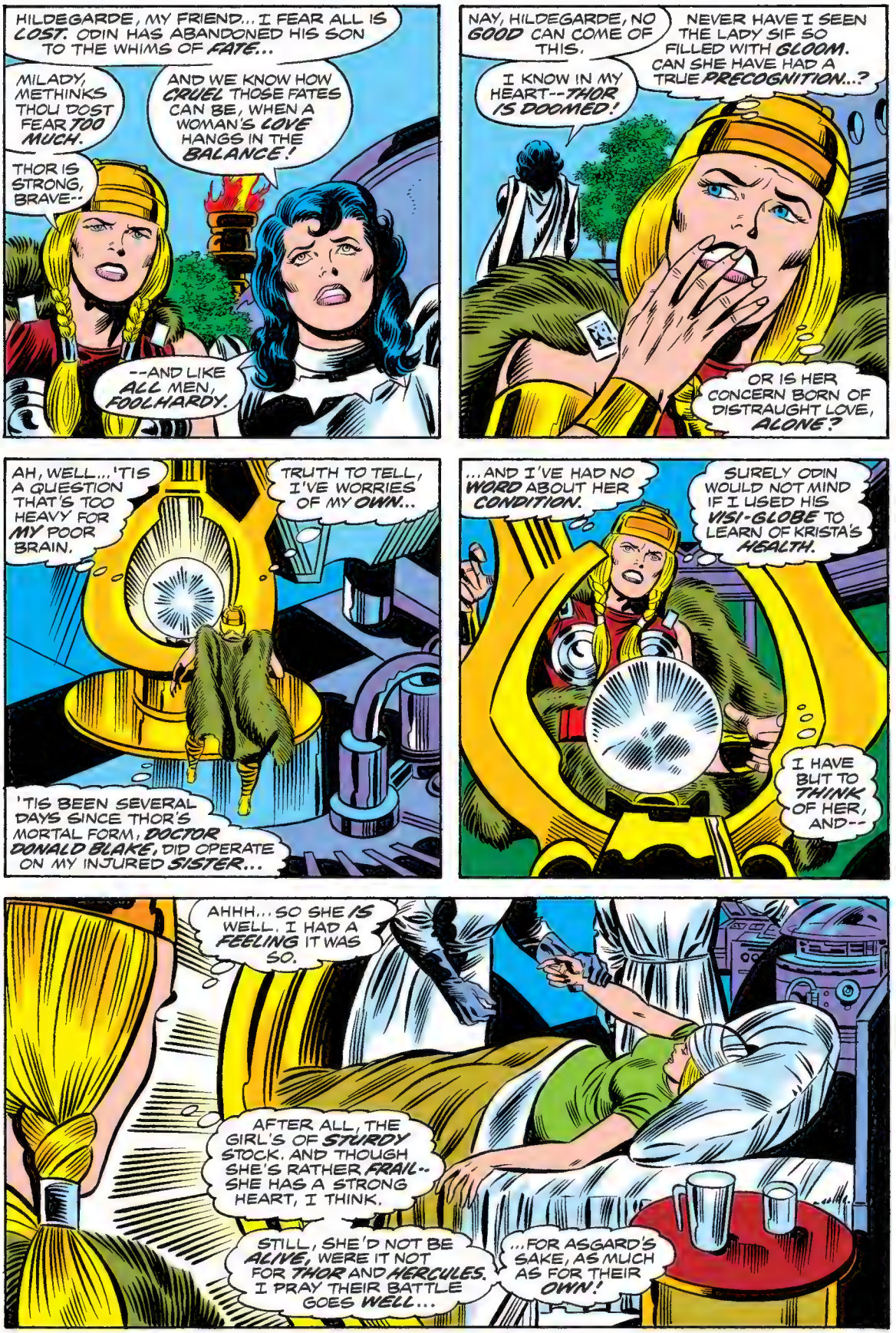
IN THE THRONE ROOM OF ODIN, THERE IS A MOMENT OF SILENCE, AS THE ALL-FATHER CONSIDERS WHAT HE HAS SEEN, AND PONDERS ITS MEANING. THEN, AS THOUGH STIRRING FROM A WAKING DREAM, ODIN LIFTS HIS LEONINE HEAD AND STATES HIS GODLY CONCLUSION...
THOR'S BATTLE MUST BE HIS ALONE.
I WRONGED HIM ONCE, BY JUDGING TOO HASTILY. I WILL NOT WRONG HIM TWICE, BY ACTING TO AID HIM--WHEN HE HAS SOUGHT NO AID.
MY SON HAS MADE HIS DECISION. I MAY ONLY SUPPORT IT.
BY THY LEAVE, SIRE--THOR IS MY BELOVED, AND I DO FEAR FOR HIM!
WILT THOU NOT RECONSIDER? SURELY, TO HELP BUT A LITTLE--
NAY, WOMAN... A LITTLE IS TOO MUCH.
THOR HAS MADE HIS POSITION CLEAR, IN ACTION IF NOT IN WORDS.
I MUST STAND ASIDE--THOUGH MY VERY SOUL CRIES OUT AGAINST IT!
AND IF THE THUNDER GOD DIES BECAUSE OF THY SILENCE?
THEN I SHALL MOURN HIM, LADY SIF... AND WHEN I HAVE FINISHED WITH MY FATHERLY GRIEF...
I WILL AVENGE HIM--
--AND EGO WILL DIE!

MY LORD! WILL REVENGE BREATHE LIFE INTO A COLD BREAST?
WILL EGO'S DEATH CANCEL THAT OF THY SON--MY LOVE?
ALL-FATHER, I BESEECH THEE IN THE NAME OF REASON--
I WARN THEE, WOMAN--NONE DARE QUESTION ODIN'S WISDOM, NOT EVEN THEE!

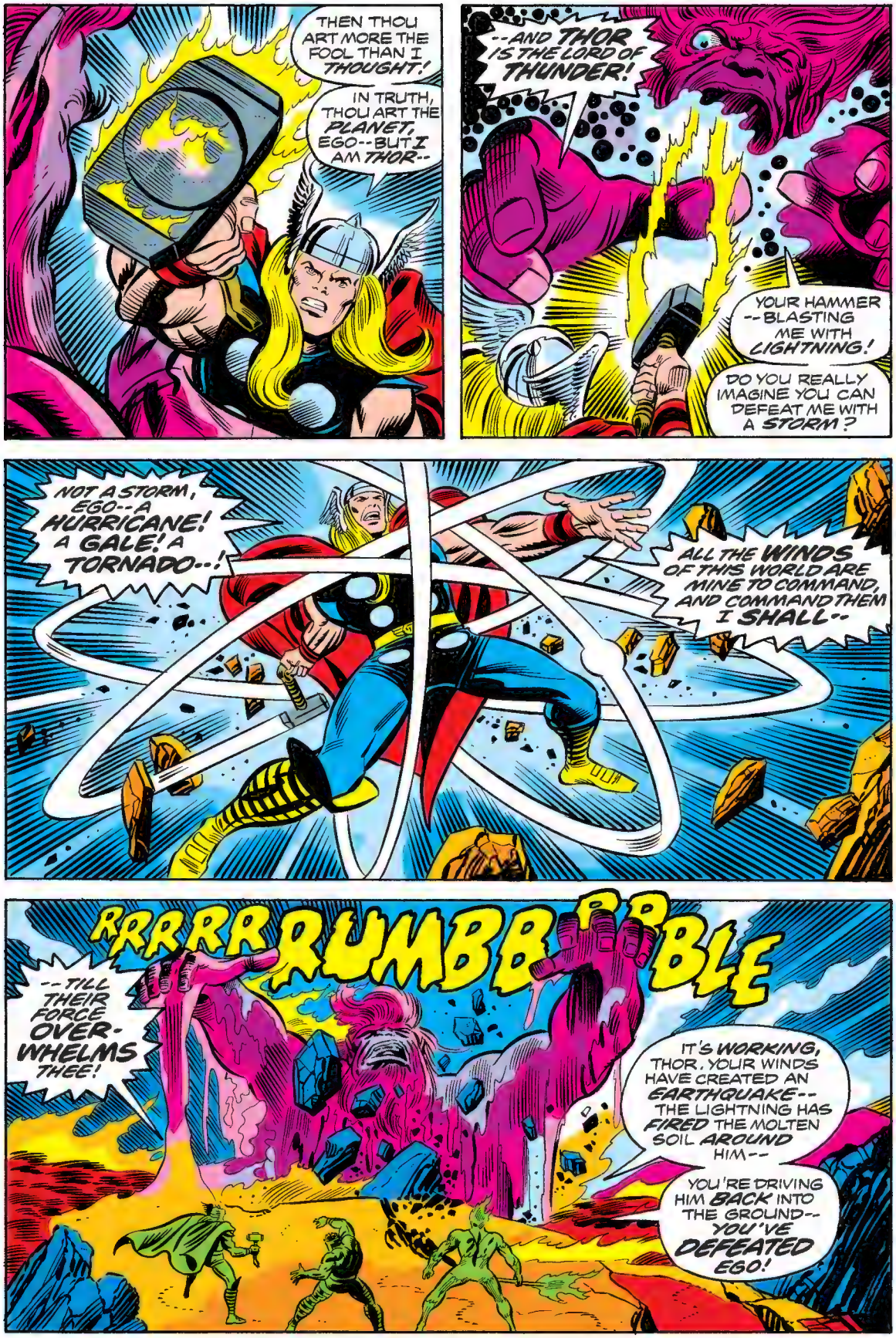

MY LORD, I SPOKE OUT OF TURN.
WILT THOU FORGIVE ME?
'TIS DONE.
KNOW THIS, SIF... THERE IS NO MIND WHICH MAY UNDERSTAND MY WILL, SAVE MY OWN...
I DO WHAT I MUST, BECAUSE I MUST.
'TIS NEVER EASY.


BUT, A SHORT TIME LATER, AS ODIN SADDLES HIS IMPERIAL MOUNT, AND READIES FOR INSPECTION OF ASGARD'S BORDERS...
...HE SEEMS TO PAUSE A MOMENT IN REFLECTION, TO HESITATE, APPARENTLY LOST IN THOUGHT OF A MOST GRIM NATURE.
FOR AN INSTANT, SIF, WATCHING FROM A NEARBY GALLERY, DRAWS IN A HOPEFUL BREATH, PRAYING THAT HER LORD HAS DECIDED TO RESCIND HIS EARLIER DECISION...

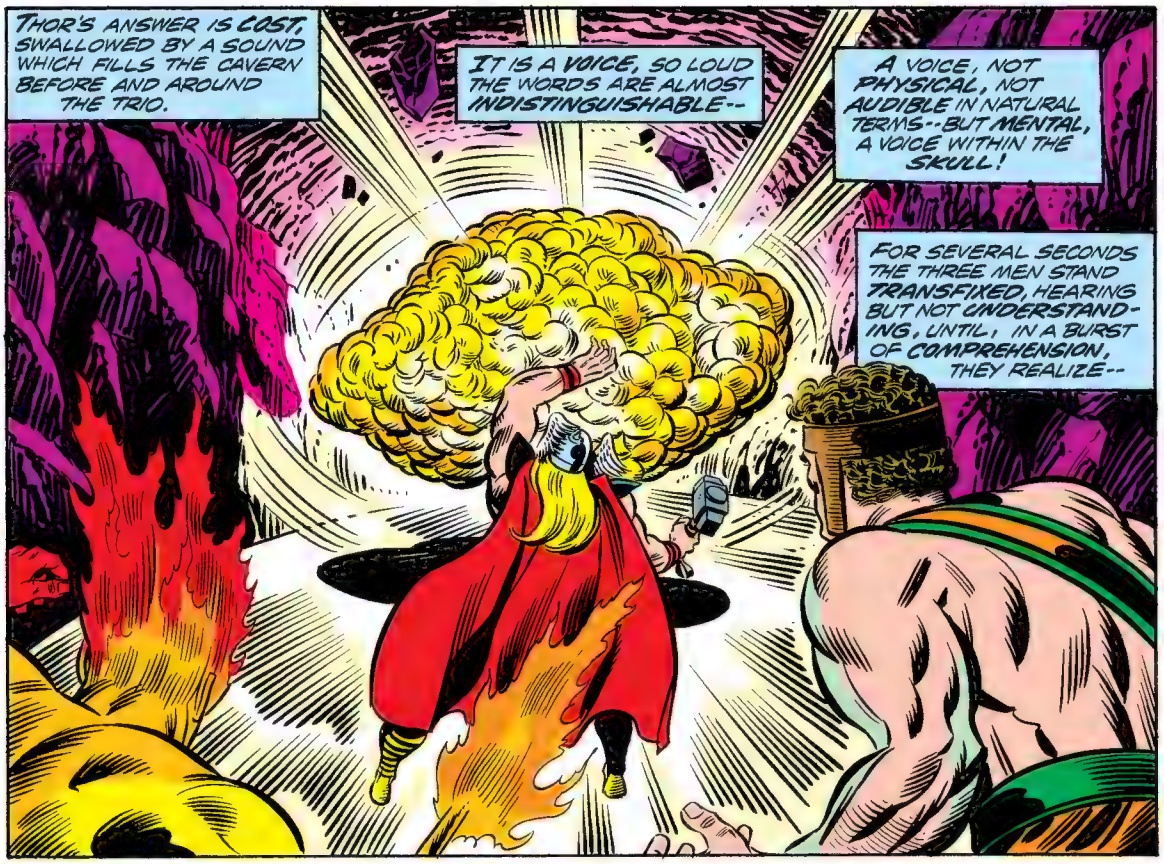

...ONLY TO LET HER BREATH OUT AGAIN IN DESPAIR, AS ODIN SHAKES OFF HIS MOMENTARY WISTFULNESS AND SPURS HIS MOUNT FORWARD ALONG THE GLEAMING RAINBOW BRIDGE...
...VANISHING QUICKLY INTO THE MISTS OF DARKNESS.

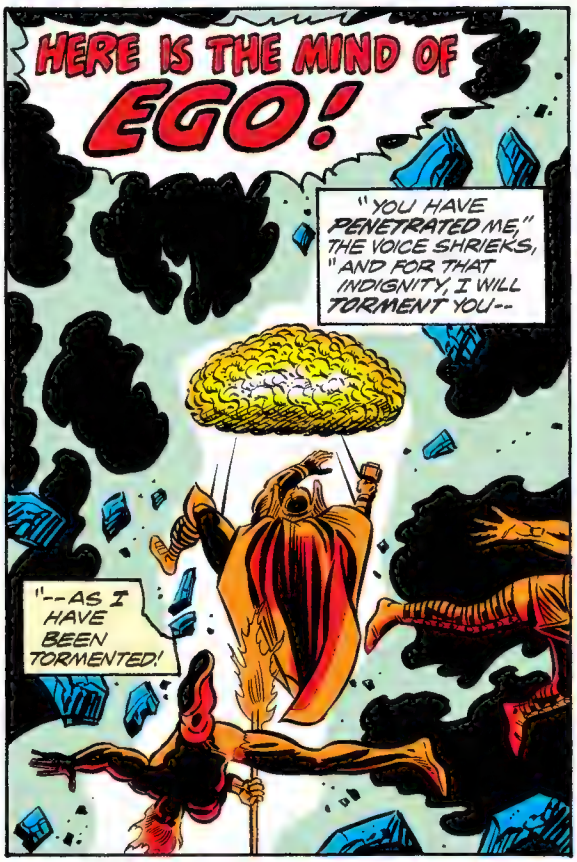

HILDEGARDE, MY FRIEND... I FEAR ALL IS LOST. ODIN HAS ABANDONED HIS SON TO THE WHIMS OF FATE...
MILADY, METHINKS THOU DOST FEAR TOO MUCH.
AND WE KNOW HOW CRUEL THOSE FATES CAN BE, WHEN A WOMAN'S LOVE HANGS IN THE BALANCE!
THOR IS STRONG, BRAVE--
--AND LIKE ALL MEN, FOOLHARDY.
NAY, HILDEGARDE, NO GOOD CAN COME OF THIS.
NEVER HAVE I SEEN THE LADY SIF SO FILLED WITH GLOOM. CAN SHE HAVE HAD A TRUE PRECOGNITION...?
I KNOW IN MY HEART--THOR IS DOOMED!
OR IS HER CONCERN BORN OF DISTRAUGHT LOVE, ALONE?
AH, WELL... 'TIS A QUESTION THAT'S TOO HEAVY FOR MY POOR BRAIN.
TRUTH TO TELL, I'VE WORRIES OF MY OWN...
'TIS BEEN SEVERAL DAYS SINCE THOR'S MORTAL FORM, DOCTOR DONALD BLAKE, DID OPERATE ON MY INJURED SISTER...
...AND I'VE HAD NO WORD ABOUT HER CONDITION.
SURELY ODIN WOULD NOT MIND IF I USED HIS VISI-GLOBE TO LEARN OF KRISTA'S HEALTH.
I HAVE BUT TO THINK OF HER, AND--
AHHH... SO SHE IS WELL. I HAD A FEELING IT WAS SO.
AFTER ALL, THE GIRL'S OF STURDY STOCK. AND THOUGH SHE'S RATHER FRAIL-- SHE HAS A STRONG HEART, I THINK.
STILL, SHE'D NOT BE ALIVE, WERE IT NOT FOR THOR AND HERCULES. I PRAY THEIR BATTLE GOES WELL...
...FOR ASGARD'S SAKE, AS MUCH AS FOR THEIR OWN!

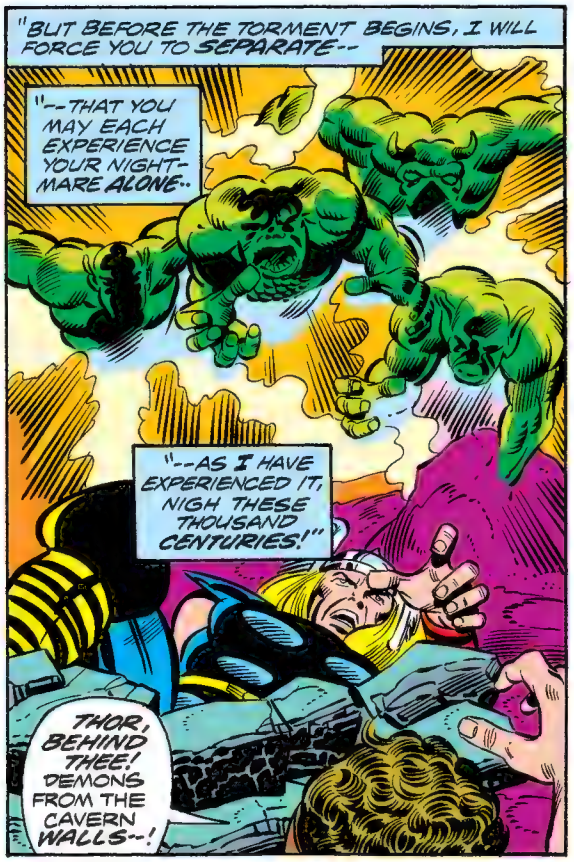
AT THAT SPLIT-SECOND, AS THOUGH IN IRONIC MOCKERY OF HILDEGARDE'S THOUGHTS, A MASSIVE FIST UNEXPECTEDLY STRIKES A FLYING GOD OF THUNDER--ON A WORLD LIGHT-YEARS DISTANT FROM ASGARD--
WHAA
--A WORLD WHOSE NAME IS EGO!
HERCULES, FIRELORD--BEWARE! THE BATTLE BEGINS ANEW, AND THIS TIME--WE STRUGGLE WITH EGO HIMSELF!
TELL ME, MONSTER--ART THOU THE MADMAN, OR THE MADMAN'S SLAVE? AND MORE--HOW DIDST THOU APPEAR SO SUDDENLY--
YEA, EGO--OR HIS EFFIGY!
--LIKE A GHOST FROM OUT OF THE AIR?
KNOW THIS, GODLING--I AM NO GHOST, BUT EGO PERSONIFIED!
MY FLESH IS THE FLESH OF THIS PLANET--MY BODY, THE STONE AT YOUR FEET!
THIS FORM EXISTS BECAUSE I CREATED IT--
SO THAT WHEN I CRUSH YOU, I MAY SEE YOUR PATHETIC FACE!

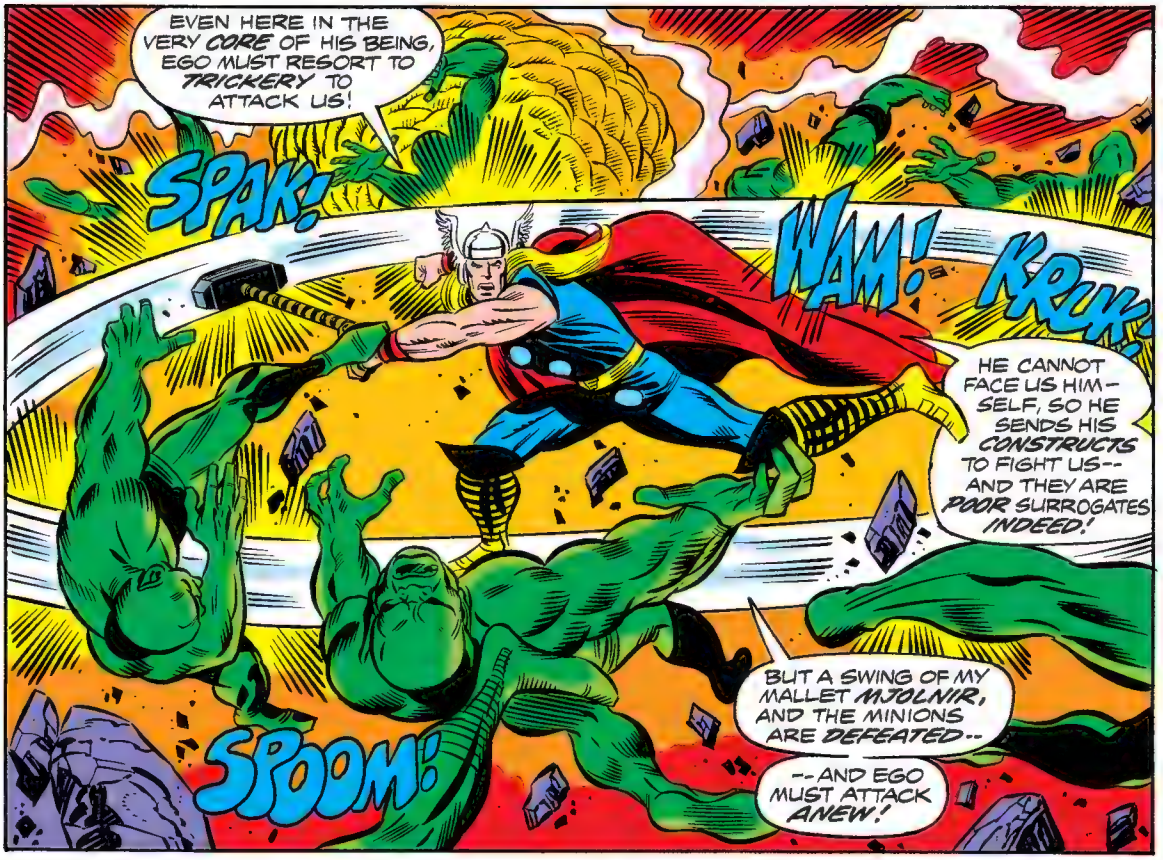

THEN THOU ART MORE THE FOOL THAN I THOUGHT!
IN TRUTH, THOU ART THE PLANET, EGO--BUT I AM THOR--
--AND THOR IS THE LORD OF THUNDER!
YOUR HAMMER --BLASTING ME WITH LIGHTNING!
DO YOU REALLY IMAGINE YOU CAN DEFEAT ME WITH A STORM?
NOT A STORM, EGO--A HURRICANE! A GALE! A TORNADO--!
ALL THE WINDS OF THIS WORLD ARE MINE TO COMMAND, AND COMMAND THEM I SHALL--
RRRRRRUMBBBBBLE
--TILL THEIR FORCE OVER-WHELMS THEE!
IT'S WORKING, THOR. YOUR WINDS HAVE CREATED AN EARTHQUAKE-- THE LIGHTNING HAS FIRED THE MOLTEN SOIL AROUND HIM--
YOU'RE DRIVING HIM BACK INTO THE GROUND-- YOU'VE DEFEATED EGO!

NOT SO. EGO IS NOT DEFEATED--ONLY HELD AT BAY.
IF WE'RE TO WREST VICTORY FROM THIS DAY, WE MUST FIND EGO'S MIND.
AND TO DO THAT, WE MUST SEARCH--
--DOWN THERE.
BY MY FATHER'S BEARD!
'TIS WHERE EGO STOOD BUT A MOMENT AGO, YET INSTEAD OF SOLID EARTH, WE FIND--
--A CAVE, LEADING DEEP INTO THE PLANET ITSELF.
THERE SHALL WE FIND EGO--IF WE DARE.
AND SO THE JOURNEY BEGINS, A MARCH WHICH LEADS DOWNWARD THROUGH THE LAYERS OF THE LIVING PLANET, PAST THE CRUST OF THE PLANETARY SURFACE, DEEP INTO THE MANTLE OF THIS BIOLOGICAL FREAK ...DOWN, TOWARD THE CORE OF THE WORLD...
DOWN... TO A PLACE OF ETERNAL NIGHT...
...AND STRANGE, UNNATURAL COLD...
...AND EVER-INCREASING WEIGHT...
UNTIL...
THUNDER GOD, THIS IS UTTER MADNESS! A PLANET DOTH GROW HOTTER TOWARD ITS CORE--NOT COOLER--!
AND THOUGH THE WEIGHT AND PRESSURE HAS INCREASED, 'TIS NOT ENOUGH--! WE SHOULD WEIGH MORE, THE PRESSURE UPON US SHOULD BE GREATER THAN--EH?
ZOUNDS! THOR--LOOK YONDER! IN THE NAME OF OUR FATHERS--
WHAT IS IT?


THOR'S ANSWER IS LOST, SWALLOWED BY A SOUND WHICH FILLS THE CAVERN BEFORE AND AROUND THE TRIO.
IT IS A VOICE, SO LOUD THE WORDS ARE ALMOST INDISTINGUISHABLE--
A VOICE, NOT PHYSICAL, NOT AUDIBLE IN NATURAL TERMS--BUT MENTAL, A VOICE WITHIN THE SKULL!
FOR SEVERAL SECONDS THE THREE MEN STAND TRANSFIXED, HEARING BUT NOT UNDERSTANDING, UNTIL, IN A BURST OF COMPREHENSION, THEY REALIZE--


HERE IS THE MIND OF EGO!
"YOU HAVE PENETRATED ME," THE VOICE SHRIEKS, "AND FOR THAT INDIGNITY, I WILL TORMENT YOU--
"--AS I HAVE BEEN TORMENTED!


"BUT BEFORE THE TORMENT BEGINS, I WILL FORCE YOU TO SEPARATE--
"--THAT YOU MAY EACH EXPERIENCE YOUR NIGHTMARE ALONE..
"--AS I HAVE EXPERIENCED IT, NIGH THESE THOUSAND CENTURIES!"
THOR, BEHIND THEE! DEMONS FROM THE CAVERN WALLS--!


EVEN HERE IN THE VERY CORE OF HIS BEING, EGO MUST RESORT TO TRICKERY TO ATTACK US!
SPAK!
WAM!
KRUK!
HE CANNOT FACE US HIM-SELF, SO HE SENDS HIS CONSTRUCTS TO FIGHT US-- AND THEY ARE POOR SURROGATES INDEED!
BUT A SWING OF MY MALLET MJOLNIR, AND THE MINIONS ARE DEFEATED--
--AND EGO MUST ATTACK ANEW!
SPOOM!

AND SO HE DOES, ASGARDIAN! FOR EACH OF THESE EARTH-CREATURES WE DESTROY, A DOZEN MORE SPRING FORTH--
BUT NEVER-MIND US, ODINSON-- 'TIS EGO THOU MUST ATTEND TO!
THE SUPPLY SEEMS INEX-HAUSTIBLE!
ACT NOW, WHILE HIS POWERS ARE DIVIDED!
WE'LL HOLD FIRM HERE--THOU MAY DEPEND ON IT!

VERY WELL, MY FRIENDS-- I NEED ONLY BREAK THROUGH YON PROTECTIVE FORCE FIELD, AND THE SECRETS OF EGO WILL BE SECRETS NO LONGER!
A SWIFT BLOW OF MY HAMMER, AND--
SHRACK!

I'M INSIDE THE BARRIER, FREE TO STRIKE AS I WILL-- TO REACH THE CENTRAL IDENTITY OF THIS BIOSPHERE, THIS MAD PLANET!
AWAKE, EGO! THOR COMMANDS THEE--
AWAKE!
STRAIGHT AND TRUE, THE MYSTIC MALLET FLIES DIRECTLY INTO THE BLOATED BRAIN SUSPENDED IN THE VERY CENTER OF THE ENORMOUS CAVERN...
FOR ONE INSTANT, THE QUIVERING MASS SEEMS TO SHUDDER IN AGONY; AND THEN--
BARROOOM!
NEXT ISSUE: THE EPIC CONCLUSION OF THIS, THOR'S MOST MIND-BOGGLING ADVENTURE (NO PUN INTENDED), IN A STORY TITLED:
EGO
BEGINNING... AND END!

THOR
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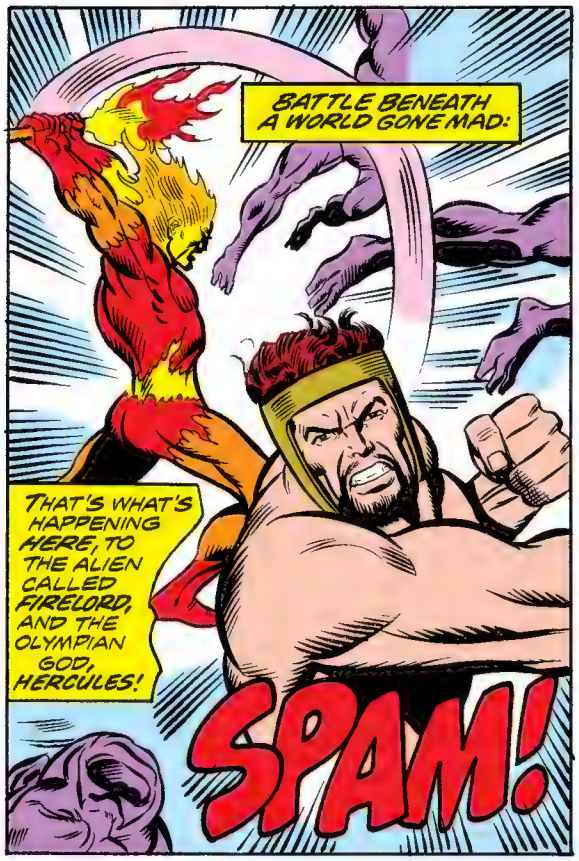
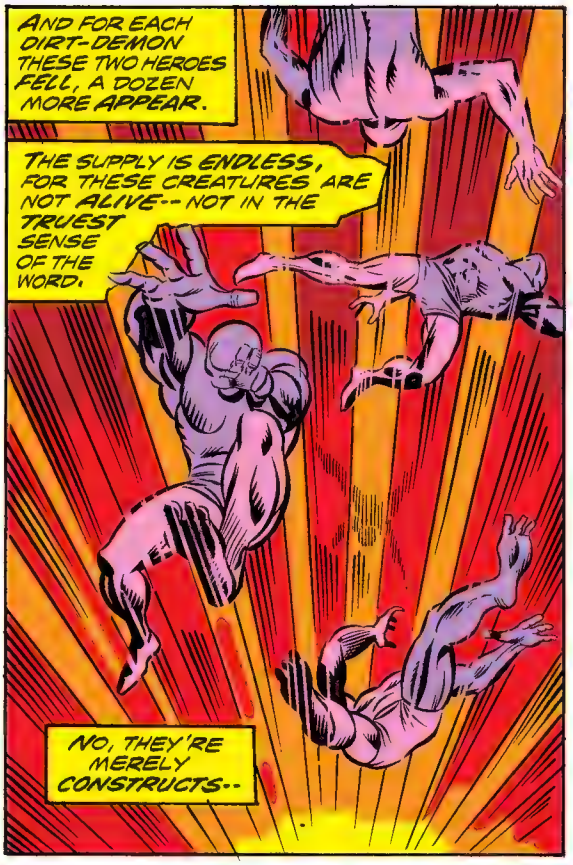
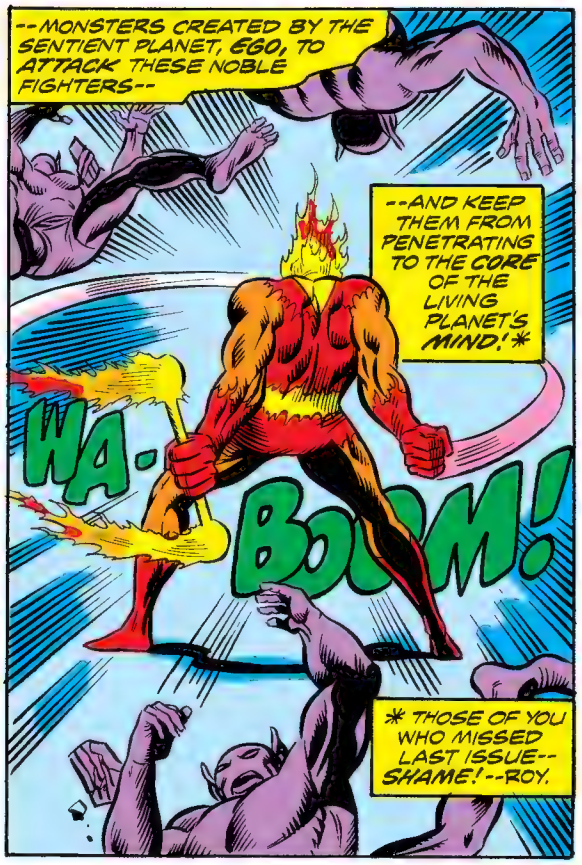
02450
THE MIGHTY
THOR
FLEE, THOR! SAVE YOURSELF! OUR SUN IS GOING NOVA!!
AND THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO TO STOP IT!
THEN WE SHALL SEE-- IF EVEN AN IMMORTAL MAY DIE!
BUCKLER/ GIACOIA
THE BIRTH AND DEATH OF EGO, THE LIVING PLANET!

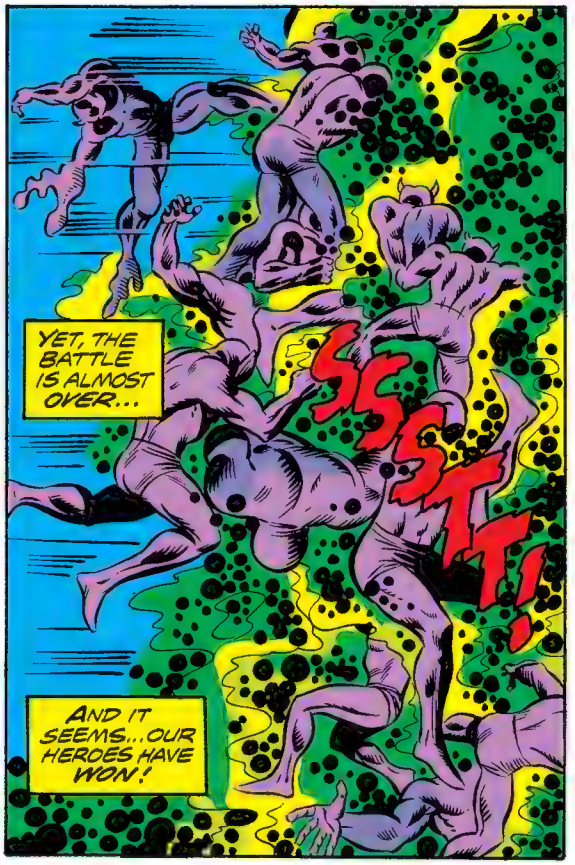
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE MIGHTY THOR!™

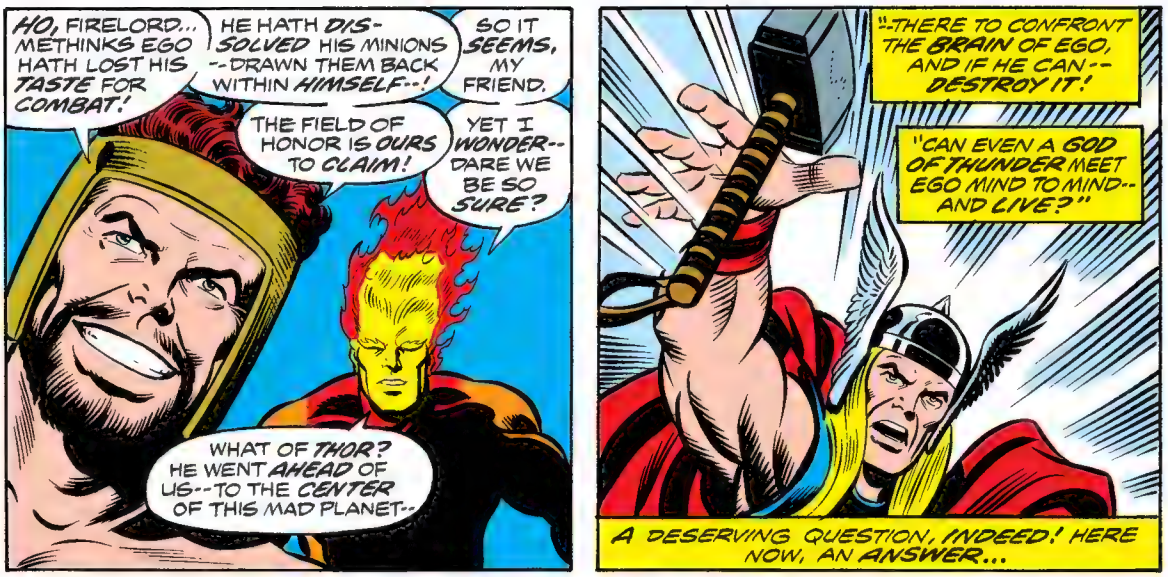
EGO:
BEGINNING and END!
A MARVEL MADHOUSE MASTERPIECE BROUGHT TO YOU BY:
GERRY CONWAY • RICH BUCKLER *
AUTHOR ARTIST
JOE SINNOTT, EMBELLISHER
JOHN COSTANZA • STAN G.
letterer colorist
ROY THOMAS, EDITOR
*NOTE FOR NITPICKERS: TO HELP RICH MEET THE DEADLINE BEFORE HE DASHED OFF TO THE CARIBBEAN FOR A WELL-EARNED VACATION, TWO BUDDIES NAMED ARVELL JONES AND KEITH POLLARD STEPPED IN TO HELP RICH OUT. IF YOU CAN FIGURE OUT WHAT PANELS THEY DID, YOU'RE 'WAY AHEAD OF US! -- ROY.

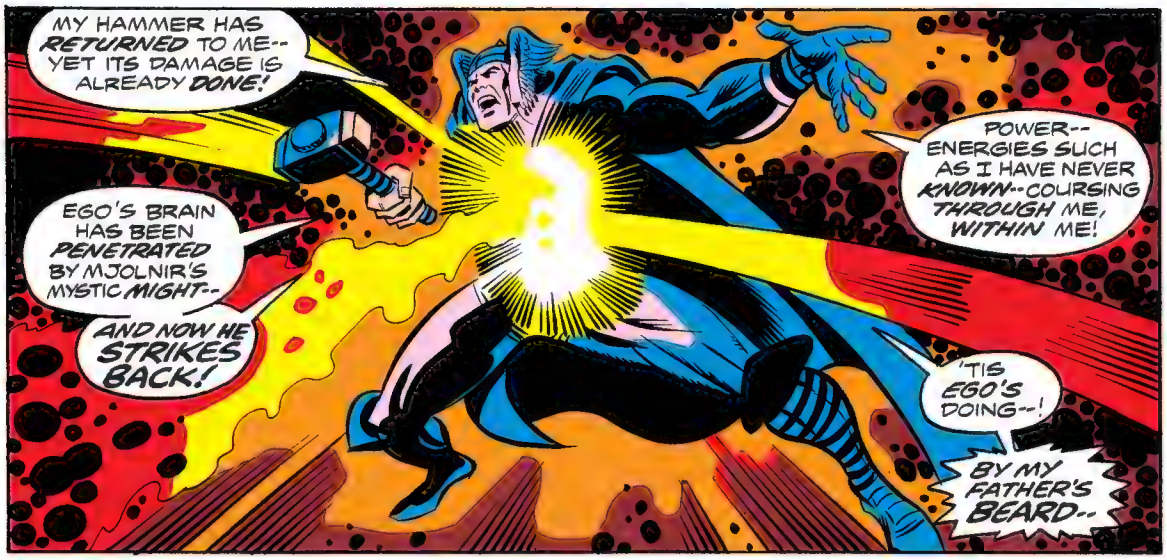

BATTLE BENEATH A WORLD GONE MAD:
THAT'S WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE, TO THE ALIEN CALLED FIRELORD, AND THE OLYMPIAN GOD, HERCULES!
SPAM!

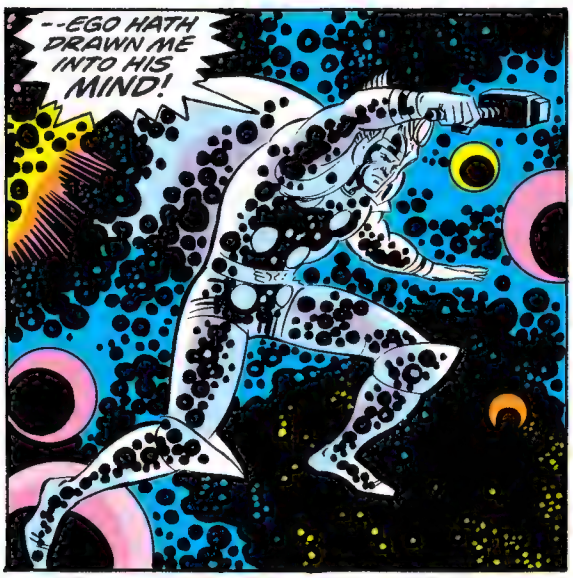

AND FOR EACH DIRT-DEMON THESE TWO HEROES FELL, A DOZEN MORE APPEAR.
THE SUPPLY IS ENDLESS, FOR THESE CREATURES ARE NOT ALIVE--NOT IN THE TRUEST SENSE OF THE WORD.
NO, THEY'RE MERELY CONSTRUCTS--

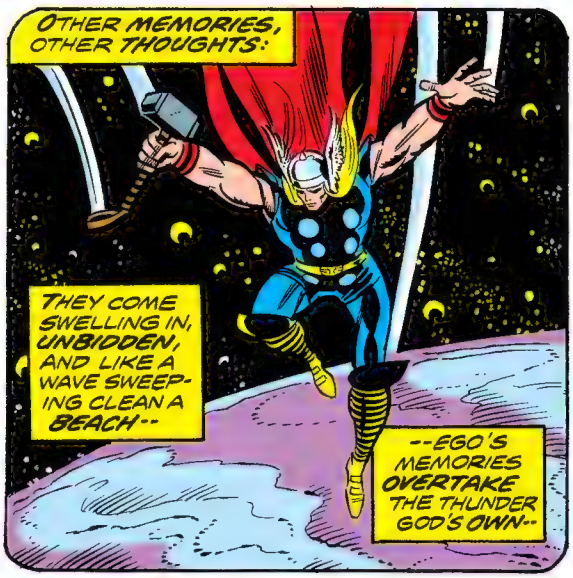

--MONSTERS CREATED BY THE SENTIENT PLANET, EGO, TO ATTACK THESE NOBLE FIGHTERS--
--AND KEEP THEM FROM PENETRATING TO THE CORE OF THE LIVING PLANET'S MIND!*
WA-
BOOM!
* THOSE OF YOU WHO MISSED LAST ISSUE--SHAME!--ROY.

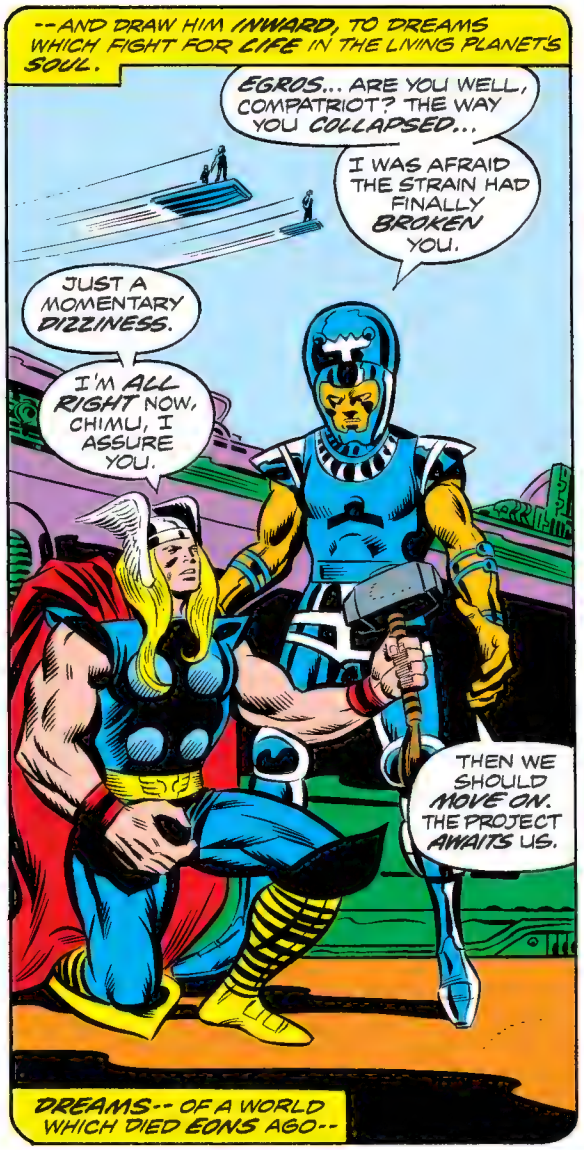

YET, THE BATTLE IS ALMOST OVER...
SSSTT!
AND IT SEEMS...OUR HEROES HAVE WON!


HO, FIRELORD... METHINKS EGO HATH LOST HIS TASTE FOR COMBAT!
HE HATH DIS-SOLVED HIS MINIONS --DRAWN THEM BACK WITHIN HIMSELF--!
SO IT SEEMS, MY FRIEND.
THE FIELD OF HONOR IS OURS TO CLAIM!
YET I WONDER-- DARE WE BE SO SURE?
WHAT OF THOR? HE WENT AHEAD OF US--TO THE CENTER OF THIS MAD PLANET--
"--THERE TO CONFRONT THE BRAIN OF EGO, AND IF HE CAN-- DESTROY IT!
"CAN EVEN A GOD OF THUNDER MEET EGO MIND TO MIND-- AND LIVE?"
A DESERVING QUESTION, INDEED! HERE NOW, AN ANSWER...

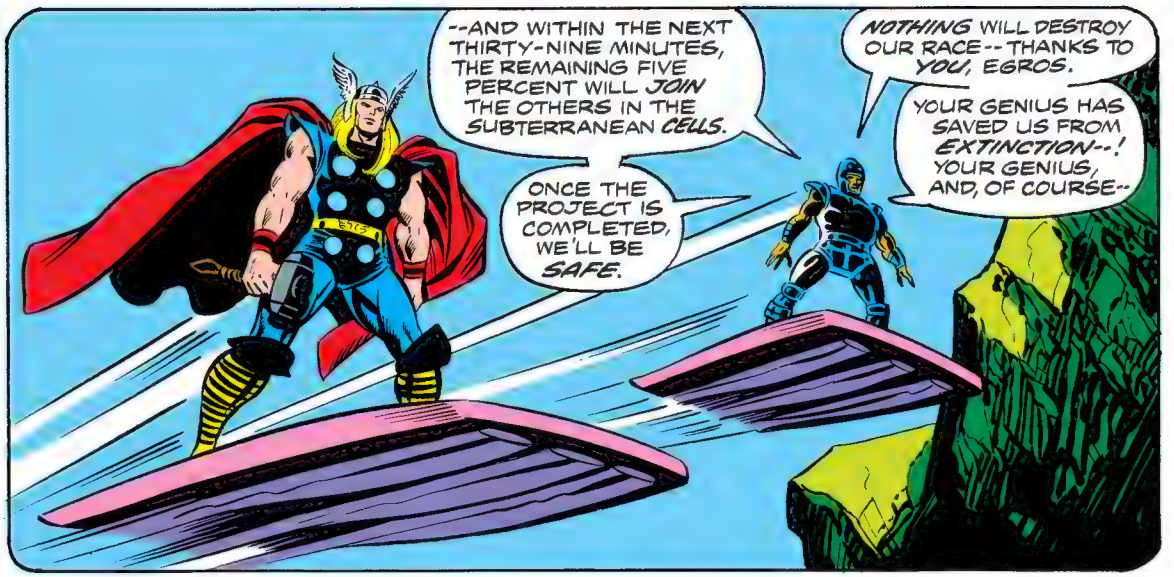

MY HAMMER HAS RETURNED TO ME-- YET ITS DAMAGE IS ALREADY DONE!
POWER-- ENERGIES SUCH AS I HAVE NEVER KNOWN--COURSING THROUGH ME, WITHIN ME!
EGO'S BRAIN HAS BEEN PENETRATED BY MJOLNIR'S MYSTIC MIGHT--
AND NOW HE STRIKES BACK!
'TIS EGO'S DOING--!
BY MY FATHER'S BEARD--

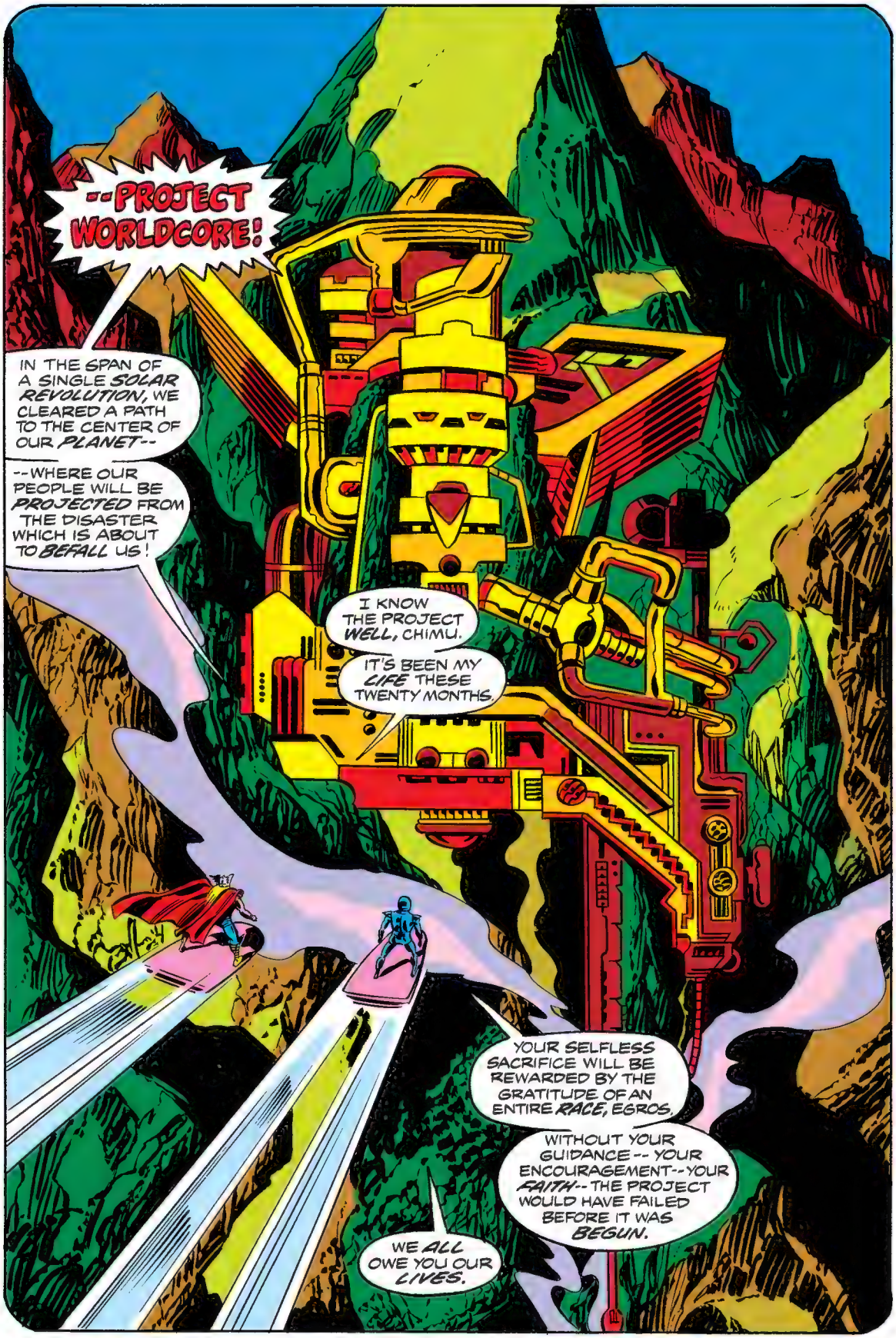

--EGO HATH DRAWN ME INTO HIS MIND!

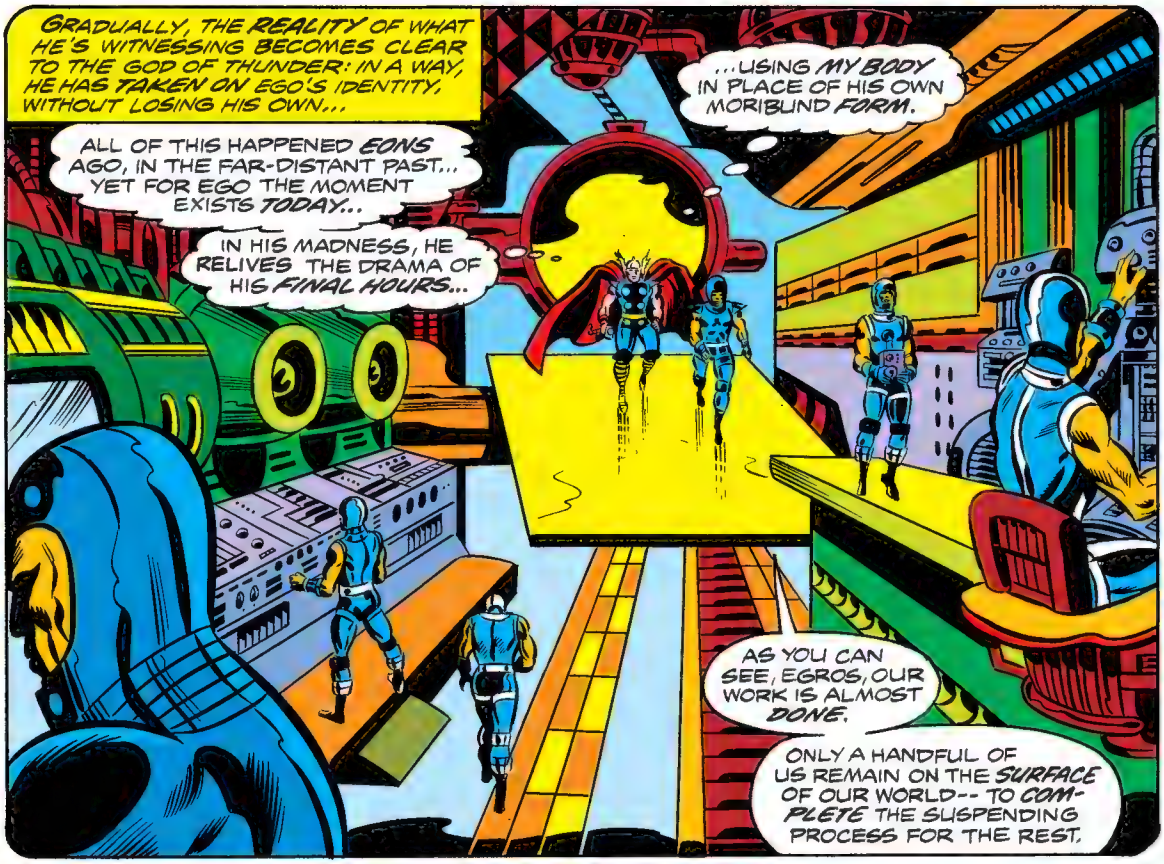

OTHER MEMORIES, OTHER THOUGHTS:
THEY COME SWELLING IN, UNBIDDEN, AND LIKE A WAVE SWEEPING CLEAN A BEACH--
--EGO'S MEMORIES OVERTAKE THE THUNDER GOD'S OWN--


--AND DRAW HIM INWARD, TO DREAMS WHICH FIGHT FOR LIFE IN THE LIVING PLANET'S SOUL.
EGROS... ARE YOU WELL, COMPATRIOT? THE WAY YOU COLLAPSED...
I WAS AFRAID THE STRAIN HAD FINALLY BROKEN YOU.
JUST A MOMENTARY DIZZINESS.
I'M ALL RIGHT NOW, CHIMU, I ASSURE YOU.
THEN WE SHOULD MOVE ON. THE PROJECT AWAITS US.
DREAMS-- OF A WORLD WHICH DIED EONS AGO--

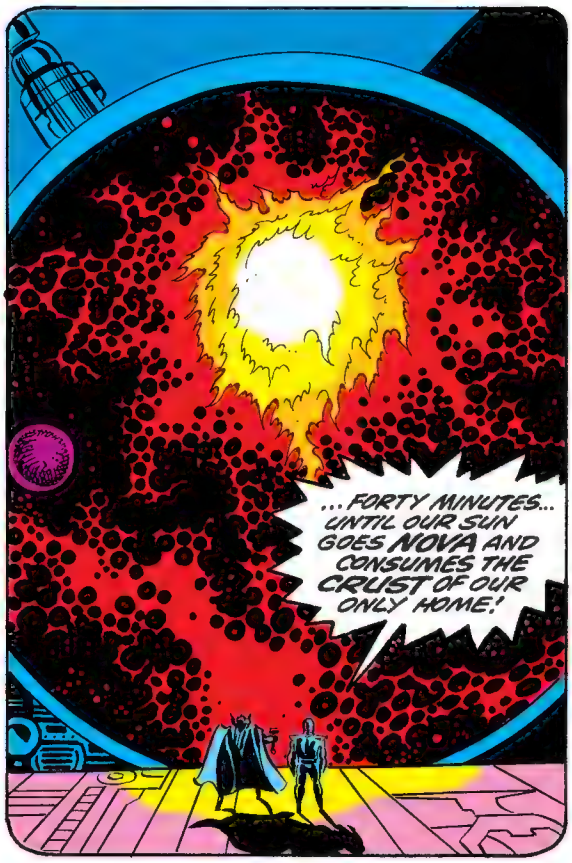
--YET STILL EXISTS IN EGO'S UNDYING MEMORY.
HEIMDAL'S EYES! I SEE WHAT EGO SAW-- I HEAR WHAT EGO HEARD-- AND I SPEAK WHAT EGO SPOKE!
MY WILL HATH ABANDONED ME...
VERILY, I AM BUT A PAWN IN THIS GAME...
...A PUPPET WHICH RELIVES THE LIVING PLANET'S PAST!
AS YOU CAN SEE, THE WORK GOES SMOOTHLY.
ALREADY, NINETY-FIVE PERCENT OF OUR RACE HAS BEEN PLACED IN A STATE OF SUSPENSION--


--AND WITHIN THE NEXT THIRTY-NINE MINUTES, THE REMAINING FIVE PERCENT WILL JOIN THE OTHERS IN THE SUBTERRANEAN CELLS.
ONCE THE PROJECT IS COMPLETED, WE'LL BE SAFE.
NOTHING WILL DESTROY OUR RACE-- THANKS TO YOU, EGROS.
YOUR GENIUS HAS SAVED US FROM EXTINCTION--! YOUR GENIUS, AND, OF COURSE--

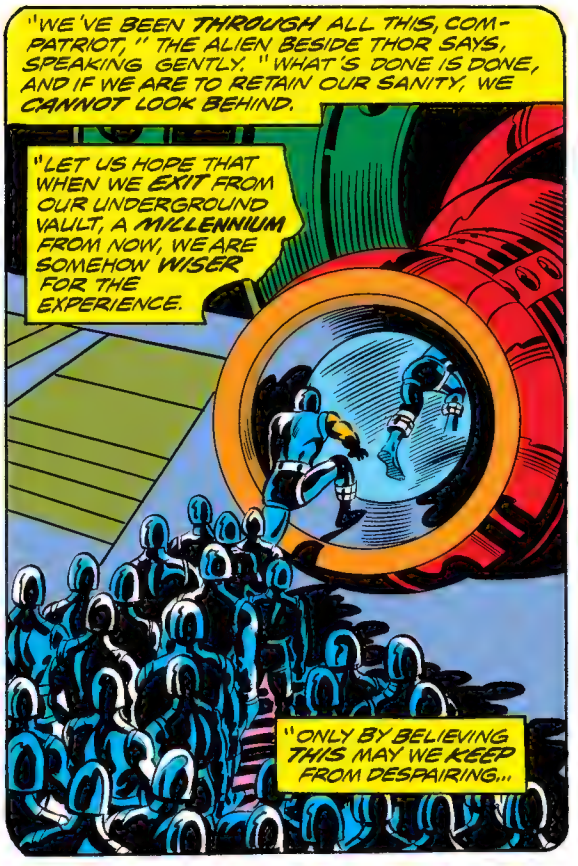

--PROJECT WORLDCORE!
IN THE SPAN OF A SINGLE SOLAR REVOLUTION, WE CLEARED A PATH TO THE CENTER OF OUR PLANET--
--WHERE OUR PEOPLE WILL BE PROJECTED FROM THE DISASTER WHICH IS ABOUT TO BEFALL US!
I KNOW THE PROJECT WELL, CHIMU.
IT'S BEEN MY LIFE THESE TWENTY MONTHS.
YOUR SELFLESS SACRIFICE WILL BE REWARDED BY THE GRATITUDE OF AN ENTIRE RACE, EGROS.
WITHOUT YOUR GUIDANCE -- YOUR ENCOURAGEMENT--YOUR FAITH--THE PROJECT WOULD HAVE FAILED BEFORE IT WAS BEGUN.
WE ALL OWE YOU OUR LIVES.

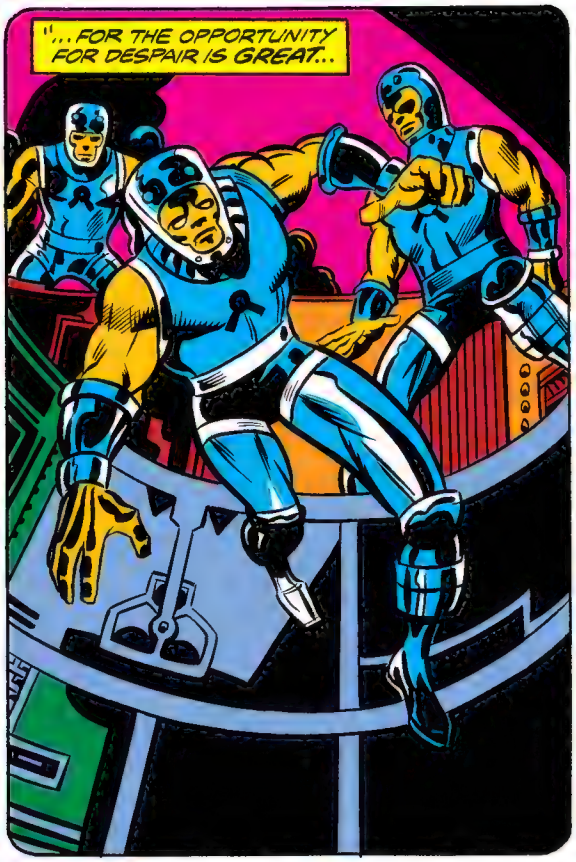

GRADUALLY, THE REALITY OF WHAT HE'S WITNESSING BECOMES CLEAR TO THE GOD OF THUNDER: IN A WAY, HE HAS TAKEN ON EGO'S IDENTITY, WITHOUT LOSING HIS OWN...
ALL OF THIS HAPPENED EONS AGO, IN THE FAR-DISTANT PAST... YET FOR EGO THE MOMENT EXISTS TODAY...
IN HIS MADNESS, HE RELIVES THE DRAMA OF HIS FINAL HOURS...
...USING MY BODY IN PLACE OF HIS OWN MORIBUND FORM.
AS YOU CAN SEE, EGROS, OUR WORK IS ALMOST DONE.
ONLY A HANDFUL OF US REMAIN ON THE SURFACE OF OUR WORLD-- TO COMPLETE THE SUSPENDING PROCESS FOR THE REST.

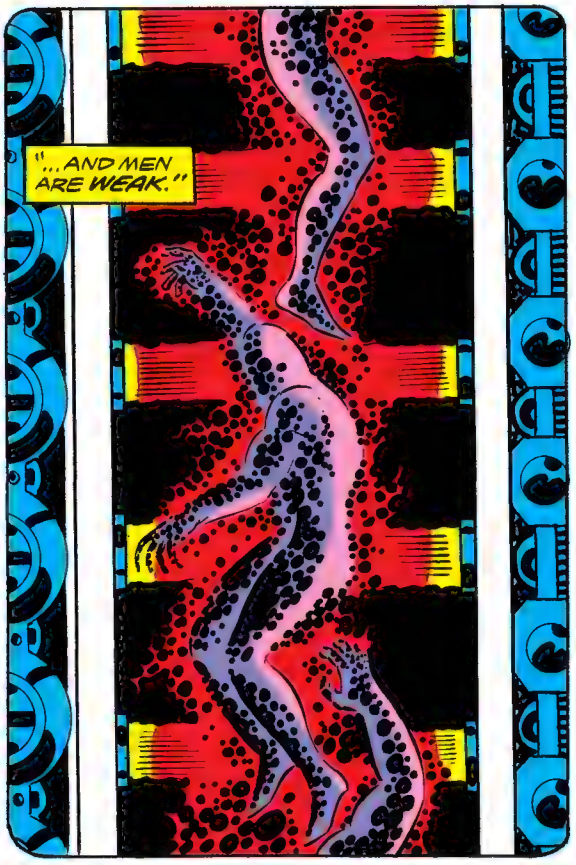
HOW LONG BEFORE THE DISASTER OCCURS?
BY MY COMPUTATIONS, THE TIME GROWS NEAR...
EXTREMELY NEAR, COMPATRIOT.
ONLY TWO THOUSAND FOUR HUNDRED SEVENTY-SIX SECONDS REMAIN UNTIL THE END OF ALL WE'VE EVER KNOWN...

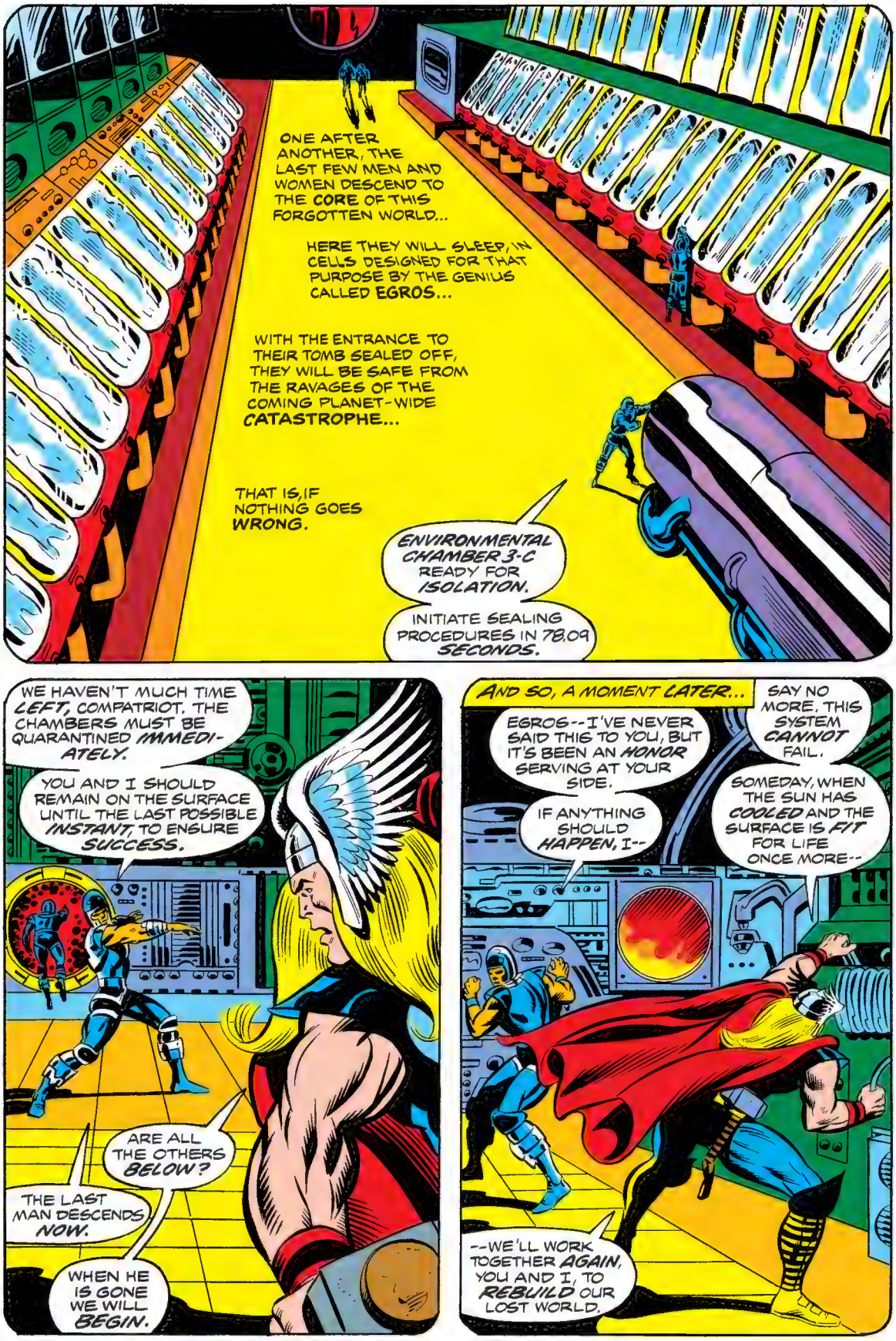

...FORTY MINUTES... UNTIL OUR SUN GOES NOVA AND CONSUMES THE CRUST OF OUR ONLY HOME!

THE ANGUISH IN THE ALIEN'S WORDS ALMOST OVERWHELMS THE SON OF ODIN... AND FOR THE FIRST TIME, HE UNDERSTANDS THE TRAGEDY BEFORE HIM...
PERHAPS IF OUR RACE HAD PURSUED ITS EARLY EFFORTS AT STAR TRAVEL, WE MIGHT HAVE ESCAPED THIS FATE...
...BUT WE WERE TOO SHORT-SIGHTED, TOO FOOLISH... AND WE LET THE FUTURE SLIP BY.
ALL WE MAY DO IS HIDE LIKE ANIMALS IN A HOLE... AND PRAY TO THE GODS FOR OUR SURVIVAL!

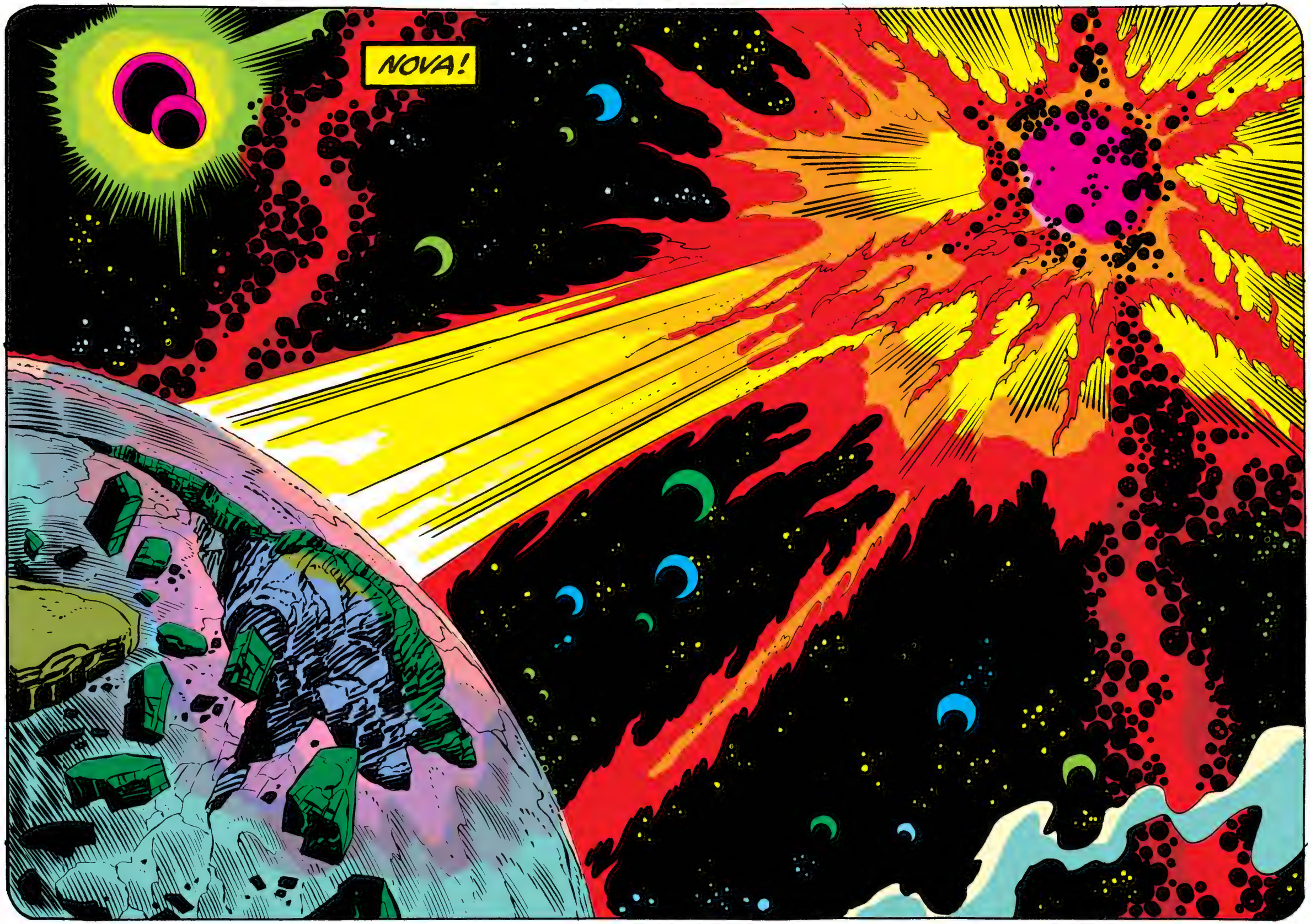

"WE'VE BEEN THROUGH ALL THIS, COMPATRIOT," THE ALIEN BESIDE THOR SAYS, SPEAKING GENTLY. "WHAT'S DONE IS DONE, AND IF WE ARE TO RETAIN OUR SANITY, WE CANNOT LOOK BEHIND.
"LET US HOPE THAT WHEN WE EXIT FROM OUR UNDERGROUND VAULT, A MILLENNIUM FROM NOW, WE ARE SOMEHOW WISER FOR THE EXPERIENCE.
"ONLY BY BELIEVING THIS MAY WE KEEP FROM DESPAIRING..


"...FOR THE OPPORTUNITY FOR DESPAIR IS GREAT...

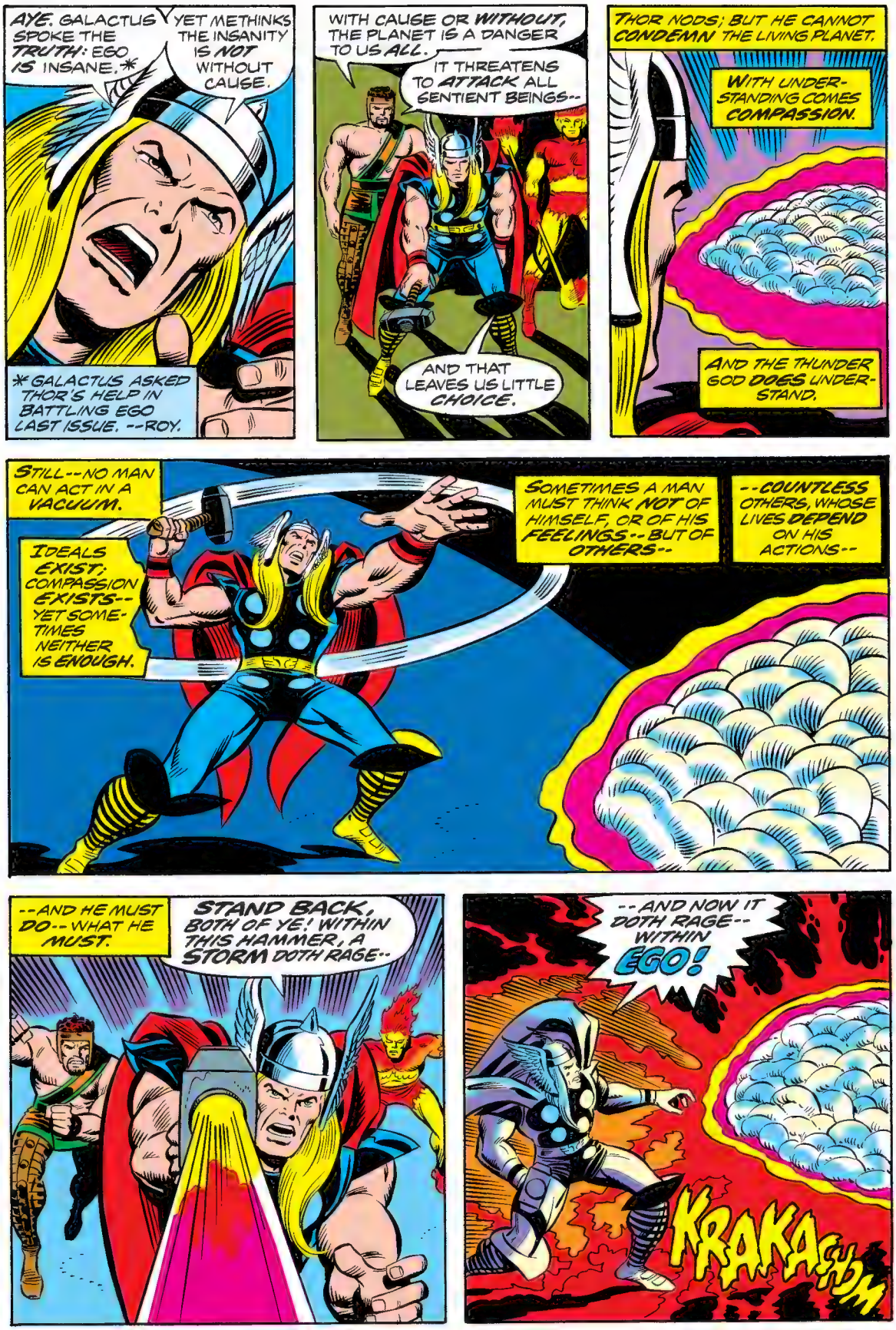

"...AND MEN ARE WEAK."

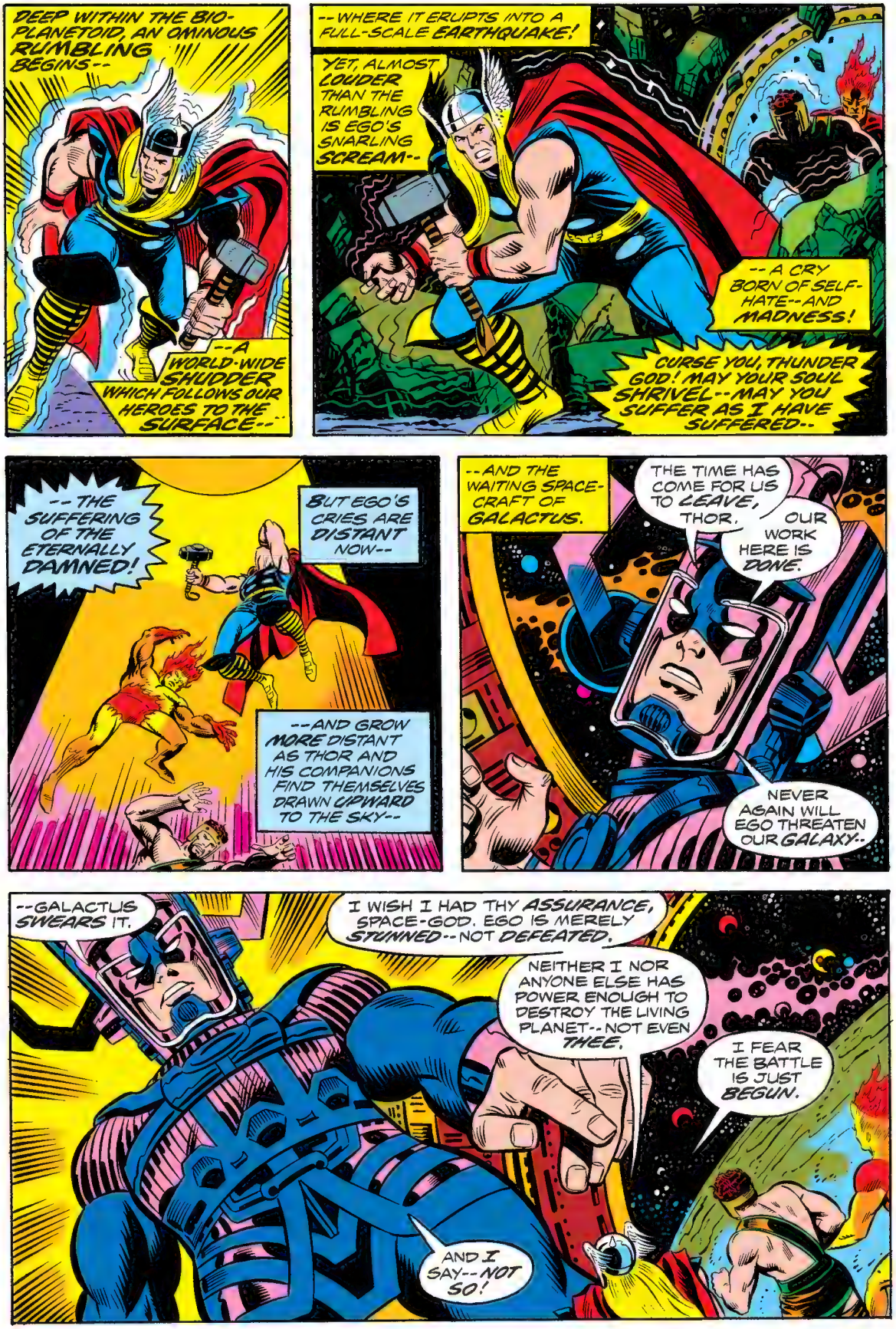

ONE AFTER ANOTHER, THE LAST FEW MEN AND WOMEN DESCEND TO THE CORE OF THIS FORGOTTEN WORLD...
HERE THEY WILL SLEEP, IN CELLS DESIGNED FOR THAT PURPOSE BY THE GENIUS CALLED EGROS...
WITH THE ENTRANCE TO THEIR TOMB SEALED OFF, THEY WILL BE SAFE FROM THE RAVAGES OF THE COMING PLANET-WIDE CATASTROPHE...
THAT IS, IF NOTHING GOES WRONG.
ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMBER 3-C READY FOR ISOLATION.
INITIATE SEALING PROCEDURES IN 78.09 SECONDS.
WE HAVEN'T MUCH TIME LEFT, COMPATRIOT. THE CHAMBERS MUST BE QUARANTINED IMMEDIATELY.
YOU AND I SHOULD REMAIN ON THE SURFACE UNTIL THE LAST POSSIBLE INSTANT, TO ENSURE SUCCESS.
ARE ALL THE OTHERS BELOW?
THE LAST MAN DESCENDS NOW.
WHEN HE IS GONE WE WILL BEGIN.
AND SO, A MOMENT LATER...
EGROS--I'VE NEVER SAID THIS TO YOU, BUT IT'S BEEN AN HONOR SERVING AT YOUR SIDE.
IF ANYTHING SHOULD HAPPEN, I--
SAY NO MORE. THIS SYSTEM CANNOT FAIL.
SOMEDAY, WHEN THE SUN HAS COOLED AND THE SURFACE IS FIT FOR LIFE ONCE MORE--
--WE'LL WORK TOGETHER AGAIN, YOU AND I, TO REBUILD OUR LOST WORLD.

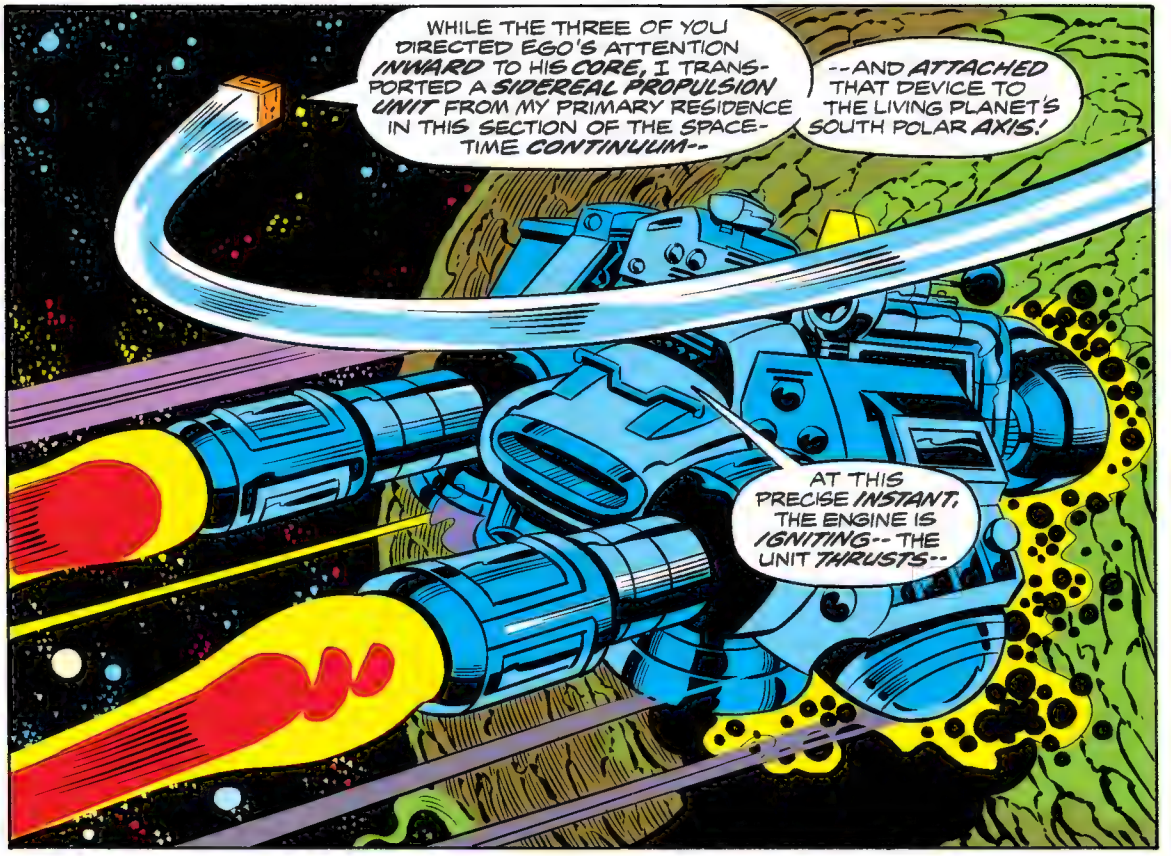
BUT FOR NOW, CHIMU, WE NEED NOT CONCERN OURSELVES WITH MIGHT-BES AND MAYBES.
PROJECT WORLDCORE WILL SUCCEED, IF ONLY BECAUSE WE PLANNED SO--
EGROS!
THE SUN!
THE SUB-SOLAR REACTION HAS STARTED FIFTY SECONDS AHEAD OF SCHEDULE!
WITHIN TEN SECONDS, THE HYDROGEN FUSION CHAIN WILL BUILD TO CRITICAL MASS--
--OUR STAR WILL EXPLODE TOO SOON!
NO! IT ISN'T POSSIBLE!
OUR CALCULATIONS WERE SO EXACT-- THERE ISN'T ROOM FOR THIS MUCH ERROR--!
WE MUST FLEE TO THE VAULT, EGROS--
--PERHAPS IF WE OPERATE THE SEALING CONTROLS MANUALLY, WE CAN STILL SURVIVE!
DON'T BE A FOOL! EVERYTHING WAS PLANNED TO THE MILI-SECOND-!
THERE ISN'T TIME TO SEAL THE CHAMBERS BEFORE THE SOLAR SHOCK WAVE HITS US!
RRUMBLLLL
THERE ISN'T TIME!
SADLY, THIS IS TRUE.
BEFORE THE MAN CALLED EGROS HAS FALLEN EVEN A THIRD OF THE DISTANCE TO THE SAFETY OF THE UNDERGROUND VAULT, THE WORLD HE HAS KNOWN ALL HIS LIFE VANISHES AROUND HIM, AS THE TREACHEROUS SUN GOES--


NOVA!

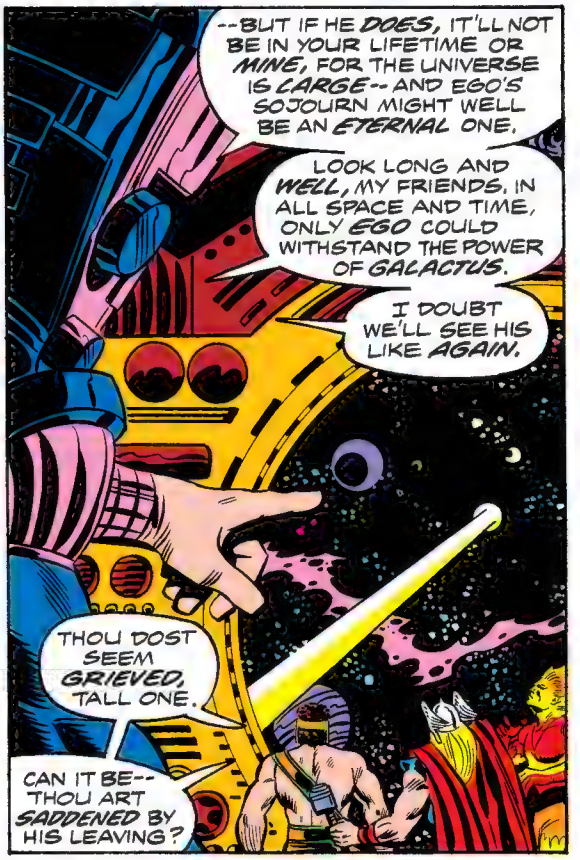
NOW IT HAPPENS: AS EGO REMEMBERS, THOR ALSO REMEMBERS...
A MOMENT OF SEARING AGONY AS RADIATION CONSUME: BOTH MAN AND WORLD.
THEN... AN INSTANT OF STARK, BLINDING TERROR... AS THE MAN REALIZES THAT HIS LIFE IS NOT YET AT AN END...
...BUT IS ONLY NOW BEGINNING.
MAN AND PLANET JOINING AS ONE--FEEDING ON THE LIVES OF TWO BILLION MEN AND WOMEN.
NO LONGER IS HE EGROS, A MAN; NO LONGER IS HE A MEMBER OF A PROUD AND NOBLE RACE.
THE RACE IS DEAD. HE IS THE RACE.
AND THIS IS THE BEGINNING--
--OF HIS GUILT--
--AND HIS MILLENNIA-LONG NIGHTMARE!
AS FOR THOR: IT MARKS THE END OF HIS NIGHTMARE, AS EGO'S MEMORIES RETREAT, TO BE REPLACED BY GRAY, GRIM REALITY.
FOR ALMOST A MILLION YEARS, EGO HELD HIS GUILT IN CHECK--
--YET WHEN TANA NILE REMOVED A PORTION OF HIS PLANETARY SURFACE FOR HER OWN PURPOSES,* EGO'S MENTAL BALANCE WAS DISTURBED--
--AND AT LAST, HE WENT MAD!
THOR! WHAT NEWS?
HAST THOU FOUND THE PLANET'S CORE?
* BACK IN THOR #195. --ROY.


AYE. GALACTUS SPOKE THE TRUTH: EGO IS INSANE.*
YET METHINKS THE INSANITY IS NOT WITHOUT CAUSE.
*GALACTUS ASKED THOR'S HELP IN BATTLING EGO LAST ISSUE. --ROY.
WITH CAUSE OR WITHOUT, THE PLANET IS A DANGER TO US ALL.
IT THREATENS TO ATTACK ALL SENTIENT BEINGS--
AND THAT LEAVES US LITTLE CHOICE.
THOR NODS; BUT HE CANNOT CONDEMN THE LIVING PLANET.
WITH UNDERSTANDING COMES COMPASSION.
AND THE THUNDER GOD DOES UNDERSTAND.
STILL--NO MAN CAN ACT IN A VACUUM.
IDEALS EXIST; COMPASSION EXISTS--YET SOMETIMES NEITHER IS ENOUGH.
SOMETIMES A MAN MUST THINK NOT OF HIMSELF, OR OF HIS FEELINGS--BUT OF OTHERS--
--COUNTLESS OTHERS, WHOSE LIVES DEPEND ON HIS ACTIONS--
--AND HE MUST DO--WHAT HE MUST.
STAND BACK, BOTH OF YE! WITHIN THIS HAMMER, A STORM DOTH RAGE--
--AND NOW IT DOTH RAGE--WITHIN EGO!
KRAKASHOOM


DEEP WITHIN THE BIO-PLANETOID, AN OMINOUS RUMBLING BEGINS--
--A WORLD-WIDE SHUDDER WHICH FOLLOWS OUR HEROES TO THE SURFACE--
--WHERE IT ERUPTS INTO A FULL-SCALE EARTHQUAKE!
YET, ALMOST LOUDER THAN THE RUMBLING IS EGO'S SNARLING SCREAM--
--A CRY BORN OF SELF-HATE--AND MADNESS!
CURSE YOU, THUNDER GOD! MAY YOUR SOUL SHRIVEL--MAY YOU SUFFER AS I HAVE SUFFERED--
--THE SUFFERING OF THE ETERNALLY DAMNED!
BUT EGO'S CRIES ARE DISTANT NOW--
--AND GROW MORE DISTANT AS THOR AND HIS COMPANIONS FIND THEMSELVES DRAWN UPWARD TO THE SKY--
--AND THE WAITING SPACE-CRAFT OF GALACTUS.
THE TIME HAS COME FOR US TO LEAVE, THOR.
OUR WORK HERE IS DONE.
NEVER AGAIN WILL EGO THREATEN OUR GALAXY.
--GALACTUS SWEARS IT.
I WISH I HAD THY ASSURANCE, SPACE-GOD. EGO IS MERELY STUNNED--NOT DEFEATED.
NEITHER I NOR ANYONE ELSE HAS POWER ENOUGH TO DESTROY THE LIVING PLANET--NOT EVEN THEE.
I FEAR THE BATTLE IS JUST BEGUN.
AND I SAY--NOT SO!


WHILE THE THREE OF YOU DIRECTED EGO'S ATTENTION *INWARD* TO HIS *CORE*, I TRANSPORTED A *SIDEREAL PROPULSION UNIT* FROM MY PRIMARY RESIDENCE IN THIS SECTION OF THE SPACE-TIME *CONTINUUM*--
--AND *ATTACHED* THAT DEVICE TO THE LIVING PLANET'S SOUTH POLAR *AXIS*!
AT THIS PRECISE *INSTANT*, THE ENGINE IS *IGNITING*-- THE UNIT *THRUSTS*--

--AND EGO BEGINS HIS *EXILE*!
PERHAPS SOMEDAY HE'LL *RETURN*, FOR THE SAVANTS SAY THE UNIVERSE IS *CURVED*-- AND THAT *ALL* THINGS RETURN TO THEIR *STARTING POINT*--


--BUT IF HE *DOES*, IT'LL NOT BE IN YOUR LIFETIME OR *MINE*, FOR THE UNIVERSE IS *LARGE*-- AND EGO'S SOJOURN MIGHT WELL BE AN *ETERNAL* ONE.
LOOK LONG AND *WELL*, MY FRIENDS, IN ALL SPACE AND TIME, ONLY *EGO* COULD WITHSTAND THE POWER OF *GALACTUS*.
I DOUBT WE'LL SEE HIS LIKE *AGAIN*.
THOU DOST SEEM *GRIEVED*, TALL ONE.
CAN IT BE-- THOU ART *SADDENED* BY HIS LEAVING?

ARE YOU SO BLIND, YOU NEED TO ASK?
ONCE, I TOO WAS A MAN, MUCH AS EGO WAS A MAN-- AND A PART OF THAT MAN STILL BREATHES WITHIN ME, AS A PART STILL BREATHES WITHIN EGO.
TO SURVIVE, I MUST DO MANY THINGS WHICH SHAME ME--THINGS I WOULD NOT DO, HAD I THE CHOICE.
WERE I NOT GALACTUS, AND WERE NOT EGO MAD-- WE MIGHT HAVE BEEN COMRADES IN A WAY YOU CAN NEVER UNDERSTAND.
BUT I AM GALACTUS-- AND EGO IS MAD-- AND OUR DESTINIES ARE DECREED.
WE HAVE OUR ROLES, AND WE MUST FULFILL THEM-- THOUGH THE SADNESS IS GREAT INDEED.
MASTER, FORGIVE ME-- BUT MAY I SPEAK?
OF COURSE. WHO HAS A GREATER RIGHT, THAN YOU-- MY MOST FAITHFUL HERALD?
SPEAK, FIRELORD. GALACTUS LISTENS.

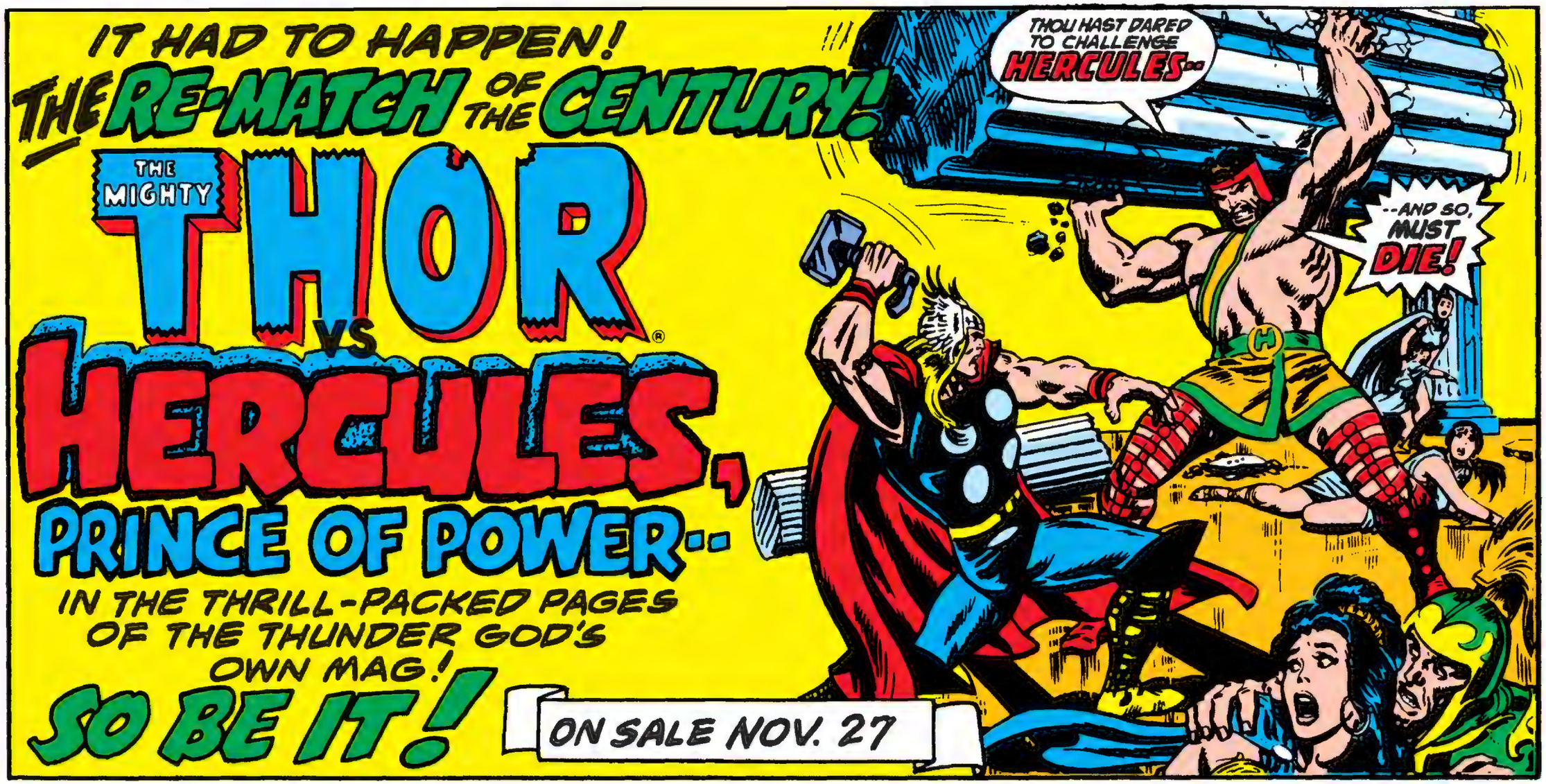
MASTER... ONCE I WAS A MAN, MUCH AS YOU WERE A MAN... A FREE MAN, WITH MY OWN DESTINY
I'VE SERVED YOU LONG AND WELL, WITHOUT CONCEIT OR COMPLAINT.
NOW I ASK YOU--I BEG YOU--
LET ME BE THAT FREE MAN AGAIN.
AYE. THY SPEECH WAS MOST FAIR IN ITS SENTIMENT, GALACTUS.
WILT THOU APPLY THE SENTIMENT TO THE REALITY--
--OR WAS THY SPEECH ONLY SPEECH?
I MEANT WHAT I SAID, THUNDER GOD, AND THIS, TOO, I MEAN--
FIND ME A HERALD TO REPLACE HIM, A HERALD FAITHFUL AND TRUE--
AND FIRELORD WILL GO FREE.
LET'S TAKE THAT PRONOUNCEMENT AS A CUE, AND EXCHANGE THAT SCENE FOR A MORE CONVIVIAL ONE: THIS ONE OCCURRING IN THE IMPERIAL THRONE ROOM OF ASGARD...
...WHERE, A FEW EARTH-DAYS LATER, ALL-FATHER ODIN EXPLODES WITH A BELLOWING LAUGH...
MY SON ASTOUNDS ME, LADY SIF--NO SOONER DOES HE PERFORM ONE MIRACLE, THAN HE SUMMARILY PERFORMS ANOTHER.
WHERE, INDEED, CAN HE FIND A NEW HERALD FOR GALACTUS--AND THUS FREE HIS FRIEND--
--THAN ON EARTH, THE MOST FAVORED OF PLANETS?
ANY OTHER GOD WOULD HAVE BEEN DEFEATED BY GALACTUS' DEMAND--BUT NOT THOR.
MY SON'S WITS ARE ALWAYS ABOUT HIM--
--AND HE HAS REMEMBERED WHAT I ALMOST DID NOT--

"--THAT THERE IS ONE PARTICULAR CREATURE WHO WOULD BE PERFECT FOR THE SPACE-GOD'S NEEDS, AND WHOSE USEFULNESS AT PRESENT IS ALMOST NON-EXISTENT--"
THE DESTROYER!
HE IS BUT A SHELL, GALACTUS--A BEING WITHOUT WILL OR IDENTITY, CREATED BY ODIN TO PROTECT THE EARTH IN THE FAR-DISTANT FUTURE.
GIVE HIM A PORTION OF THY ENORMOUS LIFE-ENERGY, AND HE WILL SERVE YOU--
--MORE FAITHFULLY THAN ANY THINKING BEING.
WELL DONE, ASGARDIAN. THIS TOY WILL BE QUITE SUITABLE.
A SIMPLE BURST OF THE POWER COSMIC--
--AND HE LIVES, MY MINDLESS SLAVE!
ZZAKK!
SO THEN, THE DEED IS DONE-- THE FIRELORD IS FREE-- AND AS FOR GALACTUS AND THE DESTROYER--
--ON MY WORD, WE'LL TROUBLE YOU NO MORE.
LIGHT: FLASHING AND REFLECTING--
--AND WHEN THE GLOW HAS FADED--
--TRUE TO HIS WORD, GALACTUS IS GONE.
AND SO, A MOMENT AFTER, IS FIRE-LORD--
--WITHOUT A SINGLE WORD OF GRATITUDE.
THINKEST THOU WE'LL MEET YON FRIEND AGAIN, THOR?
'TIS A SMALL WORLD, HERCULES--AND FRIEND OR FOE--
--WE ALWAYS "MEET AGAIN."

NEXT ISSUE THE UNEXPECTED RETURN OF AN UNEXPECTED FRIEND, IN A TALE TITLED (FOR REASONS WHICH WILL BE FRIGHTENINGLY CLEAR):

WHERE DARKNESS DWELLS, DWELL I!

The Mighty Thor #221 house ad
(from March 1974 titles)


IT HAD TO HAPPEN!
THE RE-MATCH OF THE CENTURY!
THE MIGHTY THOR
VS
HERCULES,
PRINCE OF POWER--
IN THE THRILL-PACKED PAGES OF THE THUNDER GOD'S OWN MAG!
SO BE IT!
ON SALE NOV. 27
THOU HAST DARED TO CHALLENGE HERCULES--
--AND SO, MUST DIE!

Between covers by John Romita, *Marvel Treasury Edition* #3 reprinted stories from *Journey Into Mystery* #125, *Annual* #1 & *The Mighty Thor* #126-130

MARVEL TREASURY EDITION

THE MIGHTY THOR

Vol. 1, No. 3 1974

A NOVEL-LENGTH BONANZA!

—Featuring Marvel's mightiest Immortals in the power-packed battle royal that has become a comics classic!

—table of contents—

WHEN MEET THE IMMORTALS!

WHOM THE GODS WOULD DESTROY!

THE HAMMER AND THE HOLOCAUST!

THE POWER OF PLUTO!

SPECIAL PIN-UP POSTER

THE VERDICT OF ZEUS!

MAP OF MIGHTY ASGARD

THUNDER IN THE NETHERWORLD!

We interrupt this epic adventure to bring you a peerless PIN-UP of everyone's Asgardian family, captured for posterity by BIG JOHN BUSCEMA himself. 'Nuff said!

"Whosoever holds this hammer, if he be worthy, shall possess the power of Thor!"
From the Thunder God's premiere appearance
Journey Into Mystery magazine, August, 1962

Marvel Treasury Edition #3 house ad
(from March 1975 titles)

THOU HAST DEMANDED IT.. AND THY WISH HATH BEEN FULFILLED!

MIGHTY MARVEL PROUDLY PRESENTS THE THIRD IN ITS SENSES-SHATTERING SERIES OF SUPER-SIZED LIMITED TREASURY EDITIONS!

EVERY PAGE A GIANT-SIZED 10" X 14"

A FULL FANTASTIC 100 PAGES! starring THE GALAXY'S MIGHTIEST IMMORTAL!

FEATURING THE MOST BOMBASTIC BATTLE OF ALL TIME-- THOR VS HERCULES!

PLUS:

A TOUR OF ASGARD! A PIN-UP FAMILY PORTRAIT!

EXTRA! JUST IN CASE YOUR NEWS-DEALER DOESN'T HAVE THIS SCINTILLATING SPECIAL, YOU CAN ORDER IT DIRECT FROM YOUR EVER-BENEFICIENT BULLPEN! JUST FILL OUT THE COUPON-- AND ENJOY PILGRIM! YOU DESERVE IT!

MARVEL COMICS TREASURY EDITION
575 MADISON AVENUE
NEW YORK CITY, N.Y. 10022

I CAN'T WAIT ANY LONGER. YOU'VE GOT TO SEND ME THE MIGHTY THOR TREASURY EDITION--NOW! AGE____

NAME _____
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I'M ENCLOSING A CHECK OR MONEY ORDER FOR $1.50 (PLUS 25¢ TO COVER POSTAGE AND HANDLING) SO SEND IT ALREADY!
N.Y.C. AND N.J. RESIDENTS ADD SALES TAX.

ON SALE NOW- WHEREVER MAGAZINES ARE DISPLAYED! SO BE IT!

The Mighty Thor #218, page 1 original art
by John Buscema & Jim Mooney

THOR
218
1
GERRY CONWAY * WRITER
JOHN BUSCEMA * ARTIST
JIM MOONEY * INKER
ARTIE SIMEK, LETTERER
G. ROUSSOS, COLORIST
ROY THOMAS * EDITOR
HEADS HELD HIGH, THEY WALK PROUDLY FROM THE CASTLE-KEEP OF THE ALL-FATHER, ODIN... YET IN THEIR EYES WISE MEN MIGHT SEE FEAR, FOR IN TRUTH, THESE BRAVE MEN AND WOMEN WALK FORWARD TO MEET...THE UNKNOWN!
ODIN HATH COMMANDED US TO SEEK OUT THE PLANET OF TANA NILE'S PEOPLE... THE DISTANT HOME OF THE RACE OF COLONIZERS...
...THE WORLD CALLED RIGEL.
AND IF THAT'S WHAT YOUR FATHER WANTS, THOR...
THEN THAT'S WHAT WE'LL BLOODY WELL DO!
TO RIGEL... AND IF 'TIS THERE THAT THOR DOTH GO...
...THEN 'TIS THERE THAT SIF SHALL GO AS WELL!
(AND IF YOU THINK WE'RE GOING TO CLUTTER UP A SPLASH-PAGE LIKE THIS WITH A TITLE...YOU'VE GOT ANOTHER THINK COMING! ONWARD, FRANTIC ONE--THE GRANDEUR'S ABOUT TO BEGIN!--R.T.)

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Courtesy HeritageAuctions.com

The Mighty Thor #221, page 15 original art
by John Buscema & Mike Esposito

SPANG!
NEVER!
*SPECIAL NAME-THAT-SOUND-EFFECT NO-PRIZE CONTEST! IF YOU LADS AND LASSES CAN COME UP WITH A MORE FITTING SOUND EFFECT FOR THIS SHOT, WE'LL SEND YOU ONE SPANKING, BRAND-NEW, GUARANTEED-NEVER-TO-RUN-DOWN NO-PRIZE!
(NOTE: YA CAN'T USE ANY OTHER SOUND EFFECT IN THIS ISSUE, GANG.) --GER & ROY.
A MESSAGE TO CONAN: "BEWARE THE HYRKANIANS BEARING GIFTS!"
26

Courtesy HeritageAuctions.com

BIOGRAPHIES

GERRY CONWAY

In 1969, 16-year-old Gerry Conway was shopping short stories to DC and Marvel for their horror anthology books. By 1976, Conway had worked his way up to Marvel's editor in chief. In between, he logged highlight after highlight as writer for both companies.

After establishing a pedigree with horror short stories, Conway quickly became the regular writer of *Daredevil*, *Sub-Mariner* and *Iron Man*. He also began runs on *The Amazing Spider-Man* and *Thor*, picking up both titles from none other than Stan Lee. He scripted both for nearly 50 issues, writing controversial and classic tales including "The Death of Gwen Stacy," the first appearance of the Punisher, and the introduction of Harry Osborn as the Green Goblin. Cueing off his early interest in horror stories, Conway took advantage of Marvel's burgeoning line of horror comics, launching *Werewolf By Night* and *Man-Thing*, as well as writing the first issue of *Tomb of Dracula*.

In 1976, he was handed the top job at Marvel before transitioning to DC Comics. One of his first big assignments was writing the script for one of the first inter-company crossovers, *Superman vs. The Amazing Spider-Man.* Shortly thereafter, he began a long tenure on prime DC titles like *Superboy & The Legion of Super-Heroes*, *World's Finest* and *Wonder Woman*. He also introduced Firestorm with Al Milgrom in 1978, scribing all five issues of the short-lived '70s incarnation.

As the '80s dawned, he started a long run writing both key Batman titles, *Detective Comics* and *Batman*, and continued his run on *Justice League of America*, a stint that began in earnest in 1978 and would end with the dismantling of the infamous JLA Detroit in 1986. During this era, he also revived Firestorm with artist Pat Broderick; this time the title found traction and Conway wrote the first 53 issues. A return to Marvel in the late '80s saw Conway tackling two of the three Spider-Man titles: *The Spectacular Spider-Man* and *Web of Spider-Man*.

During this period, Conway was asserting himself as a writer in film and television. His early '80s screenplay collaborations with Roy Thomas resulted in the animated film *Fire and Ice* and barbarian sequel *Conan the Destroyer*. By the late '80s, his opportunities in television writing had expanded, and he left comics to pursue writing and producing for *Matlock*, *Father Dowling Mysteries*, *Diagnosis: Murder* and *Law & Order*.

Today, Conway continues writing and producing for television and has recently returned to script the occasional comic. He resides in California with his wife and their daughter.

JOHN BUSCEMA

Though primarily known for his long tenure as one of Marvel Comics' most prolific pencilers, John Buscema began his celebrated career at the age of 21 with Timely Comics. After Timely closed its in-house Bullpen, Buscema pursued comics work for a time before he left comics altogether for advertising in 1958.

When he returned to comics, however, he did so with a vengeance. Stan Lee recruited him away from advertising and quickly ensconced him into the upper ranks of Marvel artists. Picking up where *Avengers* mainstay Don Heck left off, "Big John" began what would be one of the title's definitive artistic runs. The much-anticipated *Silver Surfer* series was launched with Buscema at the helm, and top-tier books like *Fantastic Four* and *Thor* were entrusted to his care after Jack Kirby left Marvel for DC Comics.

Buscema's bold, muscular artwork commanded the comic-book page with realistic figurework that represented the next evolutionary step in post-Kirby Marvel Comics style. The respect accorded him within Marvel as an artist's artist was of such renown that he literally wrote the book on drawing, composing *How To Draw Comics the Marvel Way* with Stan Lee, the classic "how to" book in comic-book illustration.

He worked from the '70s through the '90s on nearly every title in the Marvel stable, including his personal favorite, *Conan the Barbarian*, with Roy Thomas. He retired in 1996, but returned every now and then to the comics scene until he passed away after a battle with cancer in 2002, the same year he was inducted into the Eisner Hall of Fame.

RICH BUCKLER

Rich Buckler, along with John Buscema and George Pérez, helped define the '70s era of Marvel's flagship title, *Fantastic Four*. His dynamic style and muscular figurework carried on the tradition set by Jack Kirby. Buckler's first published artwork was a backup in King Feature's 1967 *Flash Gordon* #10, and in 1970 he landed work on Warren's *Eerie* and *Creepy* horror magazines. After illustrating a few backup stories at DC Comics, he turned to Marvel for his first feature work. By 1973, he was turned loose on *Fantastic Four* and other Marvel ongoing series like *Jungle Action* (featuring Black Panther) and *Astonishing Tales*, in which he and writer Doug Moench launched Deathlok the Demolisher. The post-apocalyptic story of Col. Luther Manning, their run on "Deathlok" was a defining vision of a future gone wrong. Its influence and themes of military rule, reanimation and killer cyborgs would be reflected in films

from *The Terminator* to *RoboCop*. After a time with DC, where he teamed with Roy Thomas on *All-Star Squadron*, Buckler returned to Marvel for work on *Spectacular Spider-Man*, *New Mutants* and a return engagement with *Fantastic Four* in the late '90s when he collaborated with writers such as Steve Englehart and Walt Simonson. He has a thriving career outside comics as a surrealist painter.

SAL BUSCEMA

Without a doubt one of comics' most prolific artists, "Our Pal" Sal Buscema joined Marvel in 1968 shortly after his elder brother, John. Tackling inking duties on *Silver Surfer* and *Fantastic Four*, including the all-time classic *Silver Surfer* #4, Buscema quickly graduated to penciling. He was an anchor of the Marvel line in the 1970s with long runs on books like *Captain America*, *Marvel Team-Up* and *The Spectacular Spider-Man* and a 100-plus issue run on *The Incredible Hulk*. Buscema was also behind defining the tone on early issues of *The Defenders*, *Rom* and *The New Mutants*. His career as one of Marvel's most versatile artists lasted throughout the '70s and into the '90s. In 1988, he returned to *The Spectacular Spider-Man* and over the next ten years penciled every issue but two from #134 through #238 (and inked the vast majority as well!) Although he retired in the late '90s, readers can still see his name on comics credits from time to time, including inking work on the cult hit *Spider-Girl*.

KEITH POLLARD

One of its most high-profile artists in the late '70s and early '80s, Keith Pollard's tenure at Marvel was notable for his sleek, refined renderings of the company's most iconic characters. He broke in at Marvel in 1974, drawing such characters as Deathlok in *Astonishing Tales*, Shang-Chi in *Master of Kung Fu*, and the super-hero action of *Black Goliath*, *Ms. Marvel*, and Black Panther in *Jungle Action*. After a stint on the black-and-white *Rampaging Hulk* magazine, Pollard was ushered into the starting lineup of creators on three of Marvel's flagship titles.

Starting in 1978, Pollard provided breakdown art on *Fantastic Four* for the legendary Joe Sinnott to finish. Soon after landing his *FF* gig, he began penciling *The Amazing Spider-Man* and then took the reins from "Big" John Buscema on *Thor*, starting a run that would encompass the epic "Eternals Saga" storyline. All in all, Pollard's hand guided the visuals of these three prime Marvel titles simultaneously, and his tenures on each book are memorable additions to each title's legacy.

In the early '80s, Pollard took on a new stable of heroes at DC, drawing several issues of *Green Lantern* and launching *The Vigilante* with writer Marv Wolfman. He returned to regular series work at Marvel in 1989, once again drawing *Fantastic Four*. By 1995, Pollard retired from comics, although he is currently appearing at conventions and doing commissioned art for his fans.

ARVELL JONES

Part of the wave of talented artists from the Detroit area who entered comics in the mid-1970s, Arvell Jones joined contemporaries like Terry Austin, Rich Buckler, Al Milgrom, Tom Orzechowski and Jim Starlin to help put the Motor City on the comic industry map. It was his buddy from the "Detroit Mob," Rich Buckler, who helped Jones break in at Marvel, bringing him under his wing on Black Panther and Deathlok. A three-issue Iron Fist run in *Marvel Premiere* was his first regular penciling gig, but after a short run on *Iron Man* and various other titles, Jones left Marvel for DC. He drew *Legion of Super-Heroes* and *Superman Family*, but it was a long run on Roy Thomas' *All-Star Squadron* for which Jones and his art are best remembered. In the early '90s, Jones joined Dwayne McDuffie's group of creators to form Milestone Comics, a universe of heroes that answered the demand for minority heroes in comics. When not working in comics, Jones has been active in television production.

Biographies researched and written by John Rhett Thomas

THE MARVEL MASTERWORKS LIBRARY

THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN VOLS. 1-16
ANT-MAN/GIANT-MAN VOLS. 1-2
THE AVENGERS VOLS. 1-14
THE BLACK PANTHER VOL. 1
CAPTAIN AMERICA VOLS. 1-7
CAPTAIN MARVEL VOLS. 1-5
DAREDEVIL VOLS. 1-8
DEATHLOK VOL. 1
THE DEFENDERS VOLS. 1-4
DOCTOR STRANGE VOLS. 1-6
THE FANTASTIC FOUR VOLS. 1-16
THE HUMAN TORCH VOLS. 1-2
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MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE VOL. 1
MS. MARVEL VOL. 1
NICK FURY, AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D. VOLS. 1-3
RAWHIDE KID VOLS. 1-2
SGT. FURY VOLS. 1-4
THE SILVER SURFER VOLS. 1-2
THE SUB-MARINER VOLS. 1-5
THE MIGHTY THOR VOLS. 1-13
WARLOCK VOLS. 1-2
THE X-MEN VOLS. 1-8
THE UNCANNY X-MEN VOLS. 1-8

THE MARVEL AGE

It was August 1961 and change was hitting the newsstands. *Fantastic Four* #1 did not feature the squeaky-clean heroes of yesteryear. These were real characters placed in extraordinary circumstances. They lived together, they fought among themselves—and sometimes, they even lost to the bad guys. This was more than a change in attitude: It was the beginning of something entirely different—the Marvel Age of Comics!

Thanks to the fertile imaginations of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko and others, an unending list of heroes followed the FF with ever-increasing acclaim and popularity: the Amazing Spider-Man, the Mighty Thor, the Incredible Hulk, Daredevil, Iron Man and the X-Men, to name but a few. These were the Marvel heroes, born of conflict and a continuous struggle to balance human lives with superhuman responsibilities.

The *Marvel Masterworks* series was created to give comic-book readers everywhere the chance to experience the greatest comics the world has known as they were originally presented.

THE GOLDEN AGE

As the Great Depression wore on and the specter of war hung over the heads of all Americans, a new entertaining escape from the newspapers' horrifying realities was born: the comic book. Within their four-color pages, larger-than-life super heroes could make short work of America's foes, giving readers of all ages hope for victory against the real-life enemies that faced the United States.

At the forefront of this new medium was Timely Comics, a young company staffed by such legendary talents as Carl Burgos, Bill Everett, Joe Simon, Jack Kirby and Stan Lee. These skilled writers and artists created a vast array of characters that would give rise to the Marvel Universe!

GOLDEN AGE ALL-WINNERS VOLS. 1-4
GOLDEN AGE CAPTAIN AMERICA VOLS. 1-6
GOLDEN AGE DARING MYSTERY VOLS. 1-2
GOLDEN AGE HUMAN TORCH VOLS. 1-3
GOLDEN AGE MARVEL COMICS VOLS. 1-7
GOLDEN AGE MYSTIC COMICS VOL. 1
GOLDEN AGE SUB-MARINER VOLS. 1-3
GOLDEN AGE U.S.A. COMICS VOLS. 1-2
GOLDEN AGE YOUNG ALLIES VOLS. 1-2

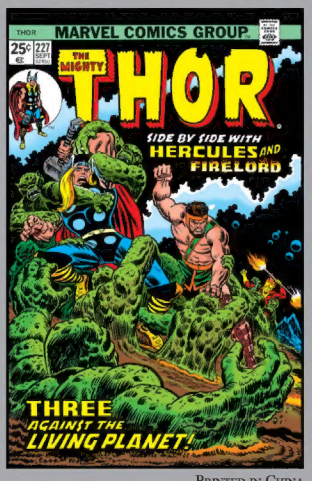
THE ATLAS ERA

Seeing super heroes waning, Timely Comics evolved into Atlas Comics and took on a vast new range of genres: science-fiction tales of outer space adventures and unimaginable monsters; realistic war comics; buxom jungle heroines; horror comics that would become the center of a moral panic that rocked the industry; and romance comics for the emerging teen audience. Even the classic costumed heroes of the '40s retooled to take on the threat of Communism. From Western gunfighters to crime to horror, Atlas had it all!

ATLAS ERA BATTLEFIELD VOL. 1
ATLAS ERA BLACK KNIGHT/YELLOW CLAW VOL. 1
ATLAS ERA HEROES VOLS. 1-3
ATLAS ERA JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY VOLS. 1-4
ATLAS ERA JUNGLE ADVENTURE VOLS. 1-3
ATLAS ERA MENACE VOL. 1
ATLAS ERA STRANGE TALES VOLS. 1-6
ATLAS ERA TALES TO ASTONISH VOLS. 1-4
ATLAS ERA TALES OF SUSPENSE VOLS. 1-4
ATLAS ERA VENUS VOL. 1

MARVEL COMICS GROUP
THE MIGHTY
THOR
FIGHTS ALONE!
IF THOR SHOULD FALL--A WORLD MUST DIE!
BUT ASGARD SHOULD NOT FALL--FOR THOR IS A GOD!
WHAT MONSTROUS SECRET LIES BEYOND THE 5 PLANETS OF DEATH!

MARVEL COMICS GROUP
THE MIGHTY
THOR
I NEED YOUR HELP, HERMOD! GO TO ASGARD AND FETCH THE MIGHTY THOR TO THE EARTH WITH ME!
AND YOU, BRAGON! YOU KNOW YOU WERE NOT CREATED TO BE DEFEATED!
BUT, CAN EVEN THUNDER PREVAIL AGAINST GALACTUS?
WHO STANDS WITH GALACTUS?



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